

# GUERRILLA MIND:

Guerrillas,  
Pirates,  
Anarchists  
and a Manifesto  
of Anti-Politics



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guerrilla

noun

1. A member of an irregular, usually indigenous, military or paramilitary force operating in small bands in occupied territory to harass and undermine the enemy, as by surprise raids.
2. War carried on by the repeated attacks of independent bands; a system of irregular warfare by means of raids and surprises.
3. Properly, a band of independent and generally predatory fighters in a war; now, more commonly, an individual member of such a band.

Such are three simple dictionary definitions of the word "guerrilla". Should we read further, we discover that "guerrilla" is a diminutive of the Spanish word "guerra" which means "war". A further dictionary defines "guerrilla" as "a member of an irregular, usually politically motivated, armed force that combats stronger regular forces, such as the army or police" and further dictionaries still flag up the term "urban guerrilla" [someone who fights in built up areas] and we learn that people like the maquis [French resistance fighters during World War 2] were "guerrillas" too. So we learn that guerrillas have the will to fight against a usually much more powerful force and that, as a result, they have to arrange, modulate and carry out their tactics accordingly. Guerrillas are usually small groups of people, armed with whatever they can find, acquire or make for themselves that, in terms of attack, use ambushes, sabotage, raids, petty warfare, hit-and-run tactics, and their mobility to harass, annoy, pick off, demoralise and, hopefully, ultimately defeat their enemy. A guerrilla is NOT a large ape that likes bananas. That's a gorilla.

From all this you may come to the conclusion that the life of a guerrilla is unorthodox, autarkic [self-sufficient], very much based on a strong bond of trust between the small groups of people that form guerrilla bands. If there's something guerrillas need to know or do then it will have to be the guerrillas who find out what they need to know and the guerrillas who complete the task. Guerrillas can't just phone up the guy who knows the thing or does the thing. They are at war, they have picked a side, they have enemies, and so that must always come into account. Their lives are at stake and they are fighting to preserve them in ways they find acceptable to themselves against forces that wish to control or even destroy them.

The thing this book is about is having, and developing, "guerrilla mind". This is not the mind of an actual guerrilla fighting in a war somewhere [although it is also that too - yet not quite how you think] but the kind of mind which, in anybody, might be said to be the mind of a guerrilla, an outlaw, someone fighting with an anti-politics against the overwhelming forces, and thinking, of mainstream, moralist, authoritarian-capitalist, political, orthodox normality. "Guerrilla mind", as I am utilising the term in this book, is that mind which ambushes, sabotages and raids the ruling thinking of this society in order to defeat it and win a war for how we think. Or, to put it in other terms, it is that mind which is even interested that more and more people might begin to think for themselves in a world that constantly gaslights them, sets an agenda for them to follow and is more than ready to provide the next thought in their head for them to react to, be outraged about and generally be occupied by [so giving you no time to "think for yourself"]. "Guerrilla mind" is that mind which is not prepared to accept being intellectually dominated and informationally bombarded by weapons of war aimed to render the mass of people incapable of thinking for themselves because they have been

turned into intellectual and moral dependents who need to be spoon-fed what to think and what to do with their lives. "Guerrilla mind" is that mind which seeks, and always cherishes, independence of mind and so thought which inevitably leads to independence of action. "Guerrilla mind" is outlaw thinking beyond the moral boundaries that society wants to dictate to you and to me; it is the will to not let others set your intellectual or moral boundaries; it is the demand for intellectual and moral independence. And not just for you, but for whoever will join you as well - and potentially for everybody [for it is thought BETTER for everybody]. Thus, as you can see, "guerrilla mind" is, in this sense, very much "the mind of an actual guerrilla fighting in a war". Yet its primarily an intellectual and moral war and only derivatively [if also] a material war [for what is one to do if people will back up their ideas and thinking with force but defend themselves?].

Much of my writing in the past has been about this war, made allusion to this war, or argued for tactics within it. The basic claim of the anarchy I have always spoken to from the beginning was that we need to be people who think differently, have different values and think for ourselves. This is a non-negotiable attribute of "the anarchist". Being intellectually and morally independent people has always been a jumping off point for any anarchism I have promoted or discussed in my own writing and conversations with others. This, for me, is both as basic and as necessary as it gets if we want to be people who decide our own lives for ourselves devoid of societal coercions. This is why I came to very much agree with the idea of "free spirits" which Nietzsche spoke about in his books and which the anarchist readers of Nietzsche, Emma Goldman and Renzo Novatore, repeated in their own differing constructions of anarchist character in their own writings too. As I am sure I have raised several times before, I find it hard to imagine how we could ever have "free societies" if we cannot even raise in ourselves the

desire to be such people as think for themselves and create *their own* ethical values and relationships. The latter is a necessary and sufficient condition of the former.

Necessarily, it is also the case that this must be a desire that comes *from* ourselves. Guerrillas are those who come to the conclusion that a malevolent power exists against whom they must fight in order to preserve an environment they want to live in. This is no less true in intellectual and moral spheres than it is in political and economic ones. I myself would argue that the former pair in fact influence and guide the latter pair. People everywhere act in accordance with their beliefs, values and thinking [or those of others with which they often come to alienating compromises] and so it matters a lot for material outcomes what these things actually are and are about. You don't imagine, do you, that 24 hour news channels owned by billionaires, or that newspaper empires owned by the same people, or that lots of other monied people besides even these, pump out their effluvia into the minds of anyone dumb enough to engage them for nothing do you? Feed people the lie, or simply the values, that you want them to ingest until it becomes a habit, normality, part of the furniture, is a tactic that happens to work - not on everybody, of course, but on enough people to make a difference. Elections are won today on the basis of people being lied to and believing the lie in enough numbers. Even those who don't believe the lie will normally share intellectual and moral values with those who do. Its how you get "democracies" where parties are meant to be opposed but actually believe almost entirely the same things and pursue almost identical goals with virtually identical policies by appealing to the same gaslit electorate. You may not be on the right or the left of politics, you may not be a supporter of this party or that, but its almost a dead cert you've accepted capitalism [as they all have as well], for example. And that makes all the difference. You are co-travellers.

So, sometimes, guerrillas are those who carry out material attacks exactly because they do not accept the prevailing values and ideas of bourgeois society. I imagine this is why Max Boot has a chapter in his book *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* titled "Propaganda by the Deed" which covers anarchist action between the early 1880s and 1939 and begins with a concise retelling of the story of Émile Henry who threw a bomb in the Café Terminus on February 12th, 1894. Henry was certainly one thinking for himself in his actions and had found himself disgusted with bourgeois society when he did so, regarding it as a criminal affront to life itself when he did. Consequently, he saw the bourgeois as criminally guilty of the society, and its oppression, that was all around him and this, in his mind, made them all legitimate targets of attack. His own attack was on so-called "ordinary" people as a result but in the years 1894-1901 anarchists of similar mind actually managed to kill the President of France, the Prime Minister of Spain, the Empress of Austria-Hungary, the President of the United States of America and the King of Italy. All of the anarchist guerrillas who murdered these people were themselves caught and subsequently executed - except, that is, for Gaetano Bresci who had murdered Umberto, King of Italy. As Italy had no death penalty at the time, he was sentenced to penal servitude on a prison island. Nevertheless, he was found dead within a year. The official story was that he had hanged himself but many maintained he had been himself murdered.

So, yes, there was a time when several anarchists, properly so called, had considerably more stomach than people using that label casually in social media bios have today. Today, sad to say, many people do not even have the stomach for taking possession of their own minds or creating their own lives in defiance of social customs and normalities and this is a huge part of the contemporary human problem when people are content to

simply be led by the nose by capitalist and authoritarian dictates and the constant distractions to self-directed thought and action they will always be able to provide. In simple terms, we might even present the problem as simply as this: not nearly enough people are living *their own* lives. They are living lives others have conditioned and decided for them and it has never occurred to them even to question the realities put before them. Profoundly incurious people, they simply swallow down whatever they are spoon-fed and act as unthinking, uncritical partisans of it: the barbarian hordes. An act of insurrection against this, in itself, such as those carried out formerly by propagandists by the deed, or even an egoistic act of self-determination that might make you stand out from the bourgeois crowd as contrary and unusual, thus becomes something increasingly impossible to even imagine, let alone contemplate. These unthinking people need to become guerrillas in a war against the oppression of all of us [which they, by being unthinking, help propagate] but the idea, should it ever be presented to them, would only strike them as bizarre and deeply unpleasant in its foreseeable conditions and consequences.

Now if you have read the *US Army Guerrilla Warfare Handbook*, as I have, then you will know that "The military operations of resistance movements are customarily supported and accompanied by political and economic activities—both overt and clandestine—of individuals and groups integrated, or acting in conjunction with, guerrillas. The several types of activities are interlocking." This is an interesting triumvirate of activities which suggests the experience of some form of oppression as the basis for any guerrilla activity. Why be a guerrilla, why be at war, unless you have a reason to fight or something you think should be fought for? Fundamentally, it seems to me, these are struggles for certain forms of social relations. Later on in the same handbook, it is said



that "resistance is the cornerstone of guerrilla warfare" and this resistance is defined in the face of some oppression, domination or otherwise intolerable "social or economic" situation. Here it is notable that not only guerrillas [who are the active combatants in this scenario] are engaged in this fight but that there are multiple ways to take part in it. Guerrillas will be the active fighters engaging in offensive operations [which, although offensive in nature, may be for entirely defensive purposes nevertheless] but there may also be more passive resisters, those who work in an underground way to support others and yet others in sympathy who simply "look the other way". In this book I'm concerned primarily with thinking of us as the guerrillas, however, and with developing guerrilla minds, with developing people who want to go on the offensive, change their thinking, affect and disrupt the thinking of others, and who want to act to defend an anarchistic view of life and be people of their own independence and intellectual and moral agency.

Consequently, this book is going to walk a line between challenging and even changing thinking [by suggesting new ways to think or new values to consider] and more practical subjects such as what to do to survive if you don't mind breaking the law. It comes from a place of commitment to actively living OTHER than how legalistic and moralistic Western democracies have gerrymandered people into thinking they should live because this is believed to be compatible with the idea "anarchy" in which I, and presumably you as a reader of this book, have some interest. This is to say that this book is going to discuss how to live as an outlaw [that is, as one outside the law] and as an immoralist [one who eschews the moral point of view - although not the idea of a personal ethics] in defiance of authoritarian-capitalist normality. This, as other books I have written, is a book for "free spirits" who insist on growing wild rather than in civilizationally-mandated serried rows. This book is about anti-politics not politics. So, in this respect, forget what you've

been taught by parents, teachers, bosses and cops [yes, even anarchists cops, for they do exist!]. Why? Because its all leading you astray and its all bullshit. It is the prison for your mind that you must break out of if you want independence and self-determination. Let me give you an extended example of those who did this before: pirates!

Within the last year or two I've become quite interested in various images which, in original form, would be commonly described as a "pirate flags" - perhaps things better known as "the Jolly Roger". This is a design, of several similar ones [often featuring some formation of skull and cross bones], which pirates flew from their masts in days of yore. (There's are examples on my front cover and contents pages.) This activity, and my fascination with its iconography, led to me thinking more about the association of pirates with anarchists, an association which, doing diligent research, has some body of scholarship behind it. [This includes interesting and authoritative work by private and public scholars who are noted anarchists themselves as in Peter Lamborn Wilson's well received book about the Barbary pirates - especially those of Rabat-Salé in Morocco - and the final book David Graeber was working on before his untimely death which covers the myths, legends and actuality of the pirates of his beloved Madagascar.] Besides these books, scholars who are not anarchists at all [although in former times some of them may well have been socialists or Marxists and the trope of a "Marxist history" is not an unknown one] have also written histories of piracy which want to link in the phenomenon of piracy to political narratives about the world of the day and so "make sense" of it as not only a historically contingent but also a convincingly political act.

I will be paying attention to such histories of pirates and piracy in what follows for it is certainly the case that pirates can be put, and seen, in political context. Some, in fact,

would suggest that this is an absolute necessity in order to make sense of them and it may even be the case, as Gabriel Kuhn asserts in his book to be discussed below, that there are "things radicals can learn" from historical pirates as a result. In fact, it turns out we need to consider such questions quite deeply so what follows will not simply be the recitation of a synthesised "cod history" of the pirates. There are any number of books by people paid to write such things for those who want them. In this text, however, I want to especially focus on that relation of pirates to anarchists and piracy to anarchy. This, of course, involves asking who the actual historical pirates were, how they lived and what they did, what their "politics against politics" was. But it also involves asking what anarchy is and what an anarchist is. This, I imagine, is no bad thing though for I often come across people who seem to have forgotten - or perhaps never even knew to begin with. Perhaps this little book discussing so-called "an-argh-chy" will then remind them!

I begin with Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's book, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. This book, which won the International Labor History Award, is written by two American Marxist historians and deals with the "many-headed hydra" of forces from "dispossessed commoners, transported felons, indentured servants [and] religious radicals" to "pirates, urban laborers, soldiers, sailors, and African slaves" which those states that were beginning to build empires, designate territories and so create capitalism had to deal with in the process of so doing. The book, as one might expect of Marxist historians, wants to tell their story in the midst of this process and describe their history as connected, a matter of politics and economics and not merely contingent events. Since I am here interested in pirates specifically I shall focus especially on this in what they have to say but, as is the nature of their argument in this book, I cannot just excerpt pirates

from history and talk about them in the abstract. Linebaugh and Rediker, in fact, write in such a way as to make this impossible and they imbue historical piracy as a phenomenon with socio-political value and meaning coming directly out of their time and place in history, and their circumstances, which we shall be forced to consider as a result. Pirates existed, in other words, when and as they existed, for specific historical reasons.

Consequently, I start not at sea aboard some pirate ship but in what was then a village called Putney just outside London, England, during the later years of the English Civil War. It was here that the so-called Putney Debates took place as the New Model Army decided what they wanted to do about their victory over the English royalists. By far the most radical of those who took part in these debates was the New Model Army officer, and *de facto* leader of the faction known as "The Levellers", Thomas Rainsborough. He advocated:

*"law in the English language (proceedings had up to then been in Latin), the right to call witnesses, the right to a speedy trial, equality under the law, no impressment [the practice of forcing people into military or naval service, often without notice], religious toleration, jury trials, no double jeopardy, the right to confront accusers, and the abolition of capital punishment for theft. He emphasized the sovereignty and rights of 'the poorest he that is in England,' and was aware of the 'many scufflings between the honest men of England and those who have tyrannized over them.' One of these scufflings concerned the denial of access to the commons, which to Rainsborough was the 'greatest tyranny that was thought of in the world.' The gentry 'turned the poor men out of doors'—that is, evicted them. Defending the popular right to the commons and the subsistence they afforded,*

*Rainsborough claimed that 'God hath set down that thing as to propriety with this law of his, Thou shalt not steal.'"*

The disputes of the English Civil War are often popularly and vulgarly painted as disputes between those who stood for the royal right of power and those who stood for parliamentary rights of power, with the latter being imagined more "democratic" than the former. But the Putney Debates revealed the so-called "grandees" of the parliamentarian side to be rather more interested in feathering their own nests than sharing out the power between everyone. Thus, people like the Leveller Rainsborough or even the Digger, Gerrard Winstanley [whom I discuss at length in other books], stood out as radicals pushing agendas that went far too far for those at the top of the New Model Army. Although these were very much against royalist pretensions, they didn't want every man to have the vote instead. What, as one Colonel expressed it, if these people then voted for "an equality of lands and estates"? Heaven forbid!

This was historically the time when "the commons" - once a term which meant unused land in general - provided the necessary territory for subsistence farming and so subsistence living. But times were changing and landowners, or those with riches and pretensions to be even bigger landowners, were coming round to the practice of farming for profit and what would become something done on an industrial basis. For this they needed LAND and that land wasn't going to be forthcoming if it was regarded as commons. This, as readers of seventeenth century history will come to realise, was exactly what animated Gerrard Winstanley with his belief that the earth was "a common treasury", a phrase often repeated in his writings. But at this time the power of property and privilege was coming into conflict with that of the mass of people and the commons

because there was the basis and reality of capitalism to be created through state power, private ownership of property and the coercion of people to work. What Linebaugh and Rediker say about this is that, in the Putney Debates, what was at issue was "a future with the commons and without slavery, or... one with slavery and without the commons."

General readers might not realise that the Levellers of the English Civil War period were anti-slavery but this was very much an active issue for the slaves were not merely captured Africans [North Africans or "Turks" would capture Europeans as their own slaves too] but many kinds of English people themselves through practices of "impressment" or press-ganging, not to mention the "spiriting" or kidnapping [which, originally, was literally as it sounds - stealing children] which might see people forcibly taken and sent across the Atlantic to colonies where they would be set to work, assuming they survived the journey, in back-breaking tasks which would kill a fair percentage more of them soon enough as well. Slaves were literally used as "human resources" [a phrase we know in another guise today] and the slave masters were not afraid to work the slaves to death as more could always be procured one way or another. Slavery at this point was not uniquely about race but it was about who could be captured and pressed (i.e. literally forced) into service. The Levellers spoke out against all of it in the face of a nascent capitalism and empire which needed manpower to do its work for it [as it always has and always will until robot, i.e. slave, armies which can do all the human work have been constructed, at least].

To this context of Putney, Linebaugh and Rediker add the Naples rebellion of 1647 and the Diggers who began their activities in 1649. The issues here were similar: the commons, or increasing lack of them, slavery, class or privilege, the possibility of

common liberty. This, of course, was also the time of Thomas Hobbes, soon to deliver his *Leviathan* to the world, and, later, of John Locke, who would discourse on the right of some people to take away what other people had because they could improve it and make use of it in ways others could not [something such people imagined GAVE THEM THE RIGHT to take away from others]. The seventeenth century was that century in which the state came into its own as we know it now and in which capitalism began to find its feet as an exploitation of private property for private wealth production which required to manipulate and exploit people generally in order to produce it. Naturally, then, who had power to do what, the supremacy of the state, the rights of human beings [or the lack of them], how society basically functioned, what belonged to who and why, how populations could be controlled, were basic and important matters of the time.

A signature event of this time period, then, might be the new English republic's action to end the activities of the Diggers on George's Hill in which the state propagated a military intervention on behalf of private property. Its interesting that, retrospectively, Linebaugh and Rediker see this as a matter of "the commons or slavery" but, of course, they are right to do so. If one has "commons" then one can subsist based on one's own labour without need for wealth. One life, as a matter of something that exists at a subsistence level, requires only the resources you have to hand and can maintain for yourself. People did this worldwide for centuries, millennia, in fact. But enclosure, private acquisition of land and wealth and the desire to produce more, made this increasingly impossible. Put very simply, if you don't have land to survive upon, if your access to basic resources is blocked by force, then your survival is put into the hands of others and you are made reliant upon them. This was exactly the issue as the Diggers saw it. Gerrard Winstanley then "opposed slavery, dispossession, the destruction of the

commons, poverty, wage labour, private property, and the death penalty." His plan was an urging of the "common people" to take their lives into their own hands, before it was too late, on common land. The State saw his ploy for what it was, however, and stamped it out definitively before it could go too far. As Winstanley saw it, the problem was simple: "The teeth of all nations hath been set on edge by this sour grape, the covetous murdering sword." As a consequence, he advocated for a worldwide proto-communism which even Lenin would later recognise as such.

This might seem like a strange background to a piece of writing that's meant to be about pirates - but perhaps, historically, pirates weren't exactly the people you see portrayed in movies produced by Disney [a company who, whilst trying to profit vastly from films about domesticated pirates, are horrified by the actions of modern digital pirates to harvest and profit from their content]. In reality, however, this political introduction, when fleshed out further, makes some sense. To do this, we need to set sail and go to sea. But to do that you need a navy. By the seventeenth century Europeans had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and found India. Others, heading west across the Atlantic, had found the Caribbean islands, North, Central and South America. One or two had even circumnavigated the globe. Europeans were thus well aware that other places existed and that these places had things they did not have. What's more, these places could be imagined as either markets to trade with or places to conquer. But to do that you need a navy and you need people to go there and get what you want.

Consequently, Linebaugh and Rediker describe a two-fold development: "the organization of the maritime state from above, and the self-organization of sailors from below." This also relates to the term "hydrarchy", a term which highlights the importance



of controlling the seas at this point in history for European empires [and others] who used the sea for trade and to increase their own colonial influence upon the world [something else which would help them to establish economically profitable footholds at various points of the globe]. The ship, as these historians then point out, "became both an engine of capitalism in the wake of the bourgeois revolution in England and a setting of resistance, a place to which and in which the ideas and practices of revolutionaries defeated and repressed" could continue to exist and circulate. In other words, it is the argument of Linebaugh and Rediker that exactly the concerns our people's revolutionaries had had on land, would also find their way to sea and rise up in the form of pirates and piracy. Not just guys with eyepatches, wooden legs and a parrot that would say "pieces of eight" on demand, pirates were about a lot more than simple greed. Because of this, they would come to pose the age's deadliest threat to the nascent capitalism of European empires - which, of course, would be their undoing in the end.

Thus, the situation at the time is that "The seizure of land and labor in England, Ireland, Africa, and the Americas laid the military, commercial, and financial foundations for capitalism and imperialism, which could be organized and maintained only through... the maritime state." England in the time of Cromwell, however, did not have many ships and there were other colonial powers [particularly the Dutch, the Spanish and the French] who were out there competing for new territories and their resources. A war was on for control of the Atlantic. Cromwell thus had to swiftly act to vastly increase his navy both in terms of ships and sailors [requiring both a merchant navy and a Royal Navy]. Shipping, it is very important to understand, was seen as the key way to increase economic power

by such states at this point in time. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, English trade would consequently rise by several percent a year, every year.

Who, however, was going to volunteer to serve aboard the ships that carried out all this activity back and forth across the Atlantic? The answer to that is that a lot of the people did not "volunteer" at all. They were simply "impressed" - which means forcibly taken - and made to be sailors on pain of death. The life of a sailor at this time was no picnic. Food on board ship was scarce and might sometimes run out. [There were no shops or telecommunications in the seventeenth century. One simply had to take what one needed when they left port. If it ran out, it ran out.] Pay was hard to come by and it wasn't unknown that sailors might wait ten years to be paid. There was also disease which was often rife [and not just scurvy for lack of vitamin C!]. Yet, by the same token, the penalty for desertion was death and the sailors, hardly the happiest bunch to begin with, were treated to violent discipline within a very hierarchical social structure to keep them at their task in service of king [or queen] and country. Then there is the fact that one navy might meet that of another whilst at sea and cannon fire might be exchanged, sinking your ship at sea. Add to that that these ships might often be transporting slaves to some recently discovered land to work there on various plantations. As we can see, from the beginning capitalism was the coercion and exploitation of human beings for the generation of privately accumulated profit. That power parliaments and sovereigns claimed to have was won at the price of human lives. The architects of this system did not think of the people they were using up morally, they were simply imagined as resources at the State's disposal. By the end of the seventeenth century England's Royal Navy was "England's greatest employer of labor, its greatest consumer of material, and its greatest industrial enterprise." It was used to defend merchant shipping and colonies

and to attack such opponents as dared to show their faces. Essentially, it was a force deployed to create watery enclosures much as enclosure had been taking place on land.

Consequently:

*"By the last half of the seventeenth century, capitalists had organized the exploitation of human labor in four basic ways. The first of these was the big commercial estate for the practice of capitalist agriculture, whose American equivalent was the plantation, in many senses the most important mercantilist achievement. Second was petty production such as the yeoman farmer or prosperous artisan enjoyed. Third was the putting-out system, which had, in Europe, begun to evolve into the system of manufactures. In Africa and the Americas, European merchants put out firearms, which were used by their clients to capture people (to sell as slaves), to kill animals (for their furs), and to destroy a wealth of common ecologies. The fourth means of organizing the exploitation of labor was the mode of production that united all of the others in the sphere of circulation—namely, the ship."*

The first and last here were the most hierarchical and, consequently, most violent of these four organisations of human labour. The ship itself, as already noted, would become the essential engine of what was by then a trans-national commercial enterprise and was, as a result, the "machine of empire", that which made empire possible. But here we must pay attention to those unfortunate sailors [of several nations] again:

*"Since conditions aboard ship were harsh and wages often two or three years in arrears, sailors mutinied, deserted, rioted, and altogether resisted naval service. Over and against these chronic struggles for freedom and money, the state used violence and terror to man*

*its ships and to man them cheaply, preying often on the poorest, most ethnically diverse populations. The press-gang, which swaggered to brutal prominence during the 1660s, swung bigger sticks in the 1690s as the demand for maritime labor continued to swell. For sailors, the press-gang represented slavery and death: three out of four pressed men died within two years, with only one in five of the dead expiring in battle. Those lucky enough to survive could not expect to be paid, as it was not uncommon, writes John Ehrman, the pre-eminent scholar of the navy of the 1690s, for a seaman to be owed a decade's wages. The figure of the starving, often lame sailor in the seaport town became a permanent feature of European civilization, even as the motley crew became a permanent feature of modern navies.*

*The dynamic of manning was different in merchant shipping, but the outcome was similar. As the conditions of seafaring life ebbed and flowed, as hard discipline, deadly disease, and chronic desertion thinned the ranks of the ship, the captain would take on sailors wherever he could find them. The ship became, if not the breeding ground of rebels, at least a meeting place where various traditions were jammed together in a forcing house of internationalism."*

Consequently, official navies, whether merchant or military, were full of miserable sailors from many places, many of whom didn't want to be there and who had been put there in the first place against their own will. But it was that or risk death in an act of desertion [which many attempted nevertheless]. Sailors, in fact, would often swap sides and it was not impossible that an English sailor might fight for the English, French, Dutch and Spanish [or even for Barbary sailors against all of these and Christendom itself] during his lifetime. These countries also employed what we might think of as "state

licenced pirates" to act as freelancers acting on their behalf, ships that would exist to attack the shipping of competitor empires on the high seas. This is where we get "corsairs" or "buccaneers" from, in fact. The ship was then the only means of communication across vast watery empires but also the place where people "from below", if we might put it like that, would meet their own kind from other nations. This, as Linebaugh and Rediker have it, acted as a means to circulate revolutionary social ideas and to teach those who found themselves at sea that just because they came from different lands it did not mean that their interests were different.

Ironically, then, it was because those in authority in various acquisitive fledgling European empires wanted to create vast naval forces to accumulate wealth from new territories that they brought together thousands of [often reluctant] sailors for the first time. What would happen if these men ever decided that they didn't want to work for a government interest anymore but that they did want to work for themselves? That's how you get pirates. However, as Linebaugh and Rediker note:

*"The process [of this proletarian and oppositional organisation] was slow, uneven, and hard to trace, not least because the alternative order of the common sailor was decapitated almost every time it reared its head, whether in mutiny, in strike, or in piracy. It took a long time for mariners to get, as one man put it, 'the choice in themselves'—that is, the autonomous power to organize the ship and its miniature society as they wanted. The sailor's hydrarchy went through several stages, appearing most clearly—and, to the authorities, most threateningly—when sailors organized themselves as pirates in the early eighteenth century."*

When piracy proper began, then, it was not as the state-sanctioned piracy it had once been, the piracy which was there to serve one empire by attacking others. Piracy proper was a self-organisation of renegade, guerrilla sailors for their own self-determined goals, a piracy that served the group and no outside, third party interest. It was, in a general sense, "anti-politics" by creating its own politics. Consequently, "when seamen—as pirates—organized a social world apart from the dictates of mercantile and imperial authority and used it to attack merchants' property (as they had begun to do in the 1690s), then those who controlled the maritime state resorted to massive violence, both military (the navy) and penal (the gallows), to eradicate piracy." If this does not remind you of Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers on land then it should - for it is essentially the same thing: people arbitrarily imagining the right to make their own lives on their own terms and for their own survival – an anti-politics that combats regular politics. In both cases, states were never going to allow that and they were never going to allow those they had coerced and manipulated on land and sea to suddenly strike blows for their own freedom which might ignite across the whole political landscape, ending economic relationships as they were currently proceeding (and being State-directed to proceed) forever. The Levellers themselves, in fact, in their writings had said that "We doe not impower them to impresse or constraint any person to serve in war by Sea or Land every man's Conscience being to be satisfied in the justness of that cause wherein he hazards his life, or may destroy an others." It is the submission of Linebaugh and Rediker that such attitudes were fundamental to that of the sea-going pirates of the later seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, attitudes which made pirates and piracy oppositional to the ideas which justified State power and commerce just as both the Levellers and Diggers had before them.

Linebaugh and Rediker tell the story of the formation of the first pirates of this "revolutionary era" [i.e. the late seventeenth century and beyond] as follows:

*"The struggles waged by sailors of the revolutionary era for subsistence, wages, and rights and against impressment and violent discipline first took autonomous shape among the buccaneers in America. Even as buccaneering benefited the upper classes of England, France, and the Netherlands in their New World campaigns against their common enemy, Spain, common seamen were building a tradition of their own, at that time called the Jamaica Discipline or the Law of the Privateers. The tradition, which the authorities considered to be the antithesis of discipline and law, boasted a distinctive conception of justice and a class hostility toward shipmasters, owners, and gentlemen adventurers. It also featured democratic controls on authority and provision for the injured. In fashioning their hydrarchy, the buccaneers drew upon the peasant utopia called the Land of Cockayne, where work had been abolished, property redistributed, social distinctions levelled, health restored, and food made abundant. They also drew on international maritime custom, by which ancient and medieval seafarers had divided their money and goods into shares, consulted collectively and democratically on matters of moment, and elected consuls to adjudicate differences between captain and crew.*

*The early shapers of the tradition were those whom one English official in the Caribbean called the 'outcasts of all nations'—the convicts, prostitutes, debtors, vagabonds, escaped slaves and indentured servants, religious radicals, and political prisoners, all of whom had migrated or been exiled to the new settlements 'beyond the line.' Another royal administrator explained that the buccaneers were former servants and 'all men of unfortunate and desperate condition.' Many French buccaneers, such as Alexander*

*Exquemelin, had been indentured servants and before that textile workers and day laborers. Most of the buccaneers were English or French, but Dutch, Irish, Scottish, Scandinavian, Native American, and African men also joined up, often after they had in one way or another escaped the brutalities of the Caribbean's nascent plantation system.*

*These workers drifted to uninhabited islands, where they formed maroon communities. Their autonomous settlements were multiracial in nature and organized around hunting and gathering—usually the hunting of wild cattle and pigs and the gathering of the King of Spain's gold. These communities combined the experiences of peasant rebels, demobilized soldiers, dispossessed smallholders, unemployed workers, and others from several nations and cultures, including the Carib, Cuna, and Mosquito Indians."*

Your classical late seventeenth or early eighteenth century pirate was then essentially one who, instead of being part of a land-based "maroon community", had taken his place in a "multiracial maroon community" at sea. He became part of a revolutionary, oppositional and anti-political culture which had plenty of reasons to hate states and navies and mercantile economic interests. Linebaugh and Rediker argue, after others to be sure, that this was a "world turned upside down" not least based on the "articles of agreement" the pirates established between and for themselves quite consensually. In a long quotation it will be helpful to quote here in full, just exactly what the pirates were about is made plain:

*"Pirates distributed justice, elected officers, divided loot equally, and established a different discipline. They limited the authority of the captain, resisted many of the practices of the capitalist merchant shipping industry, and maintained a multicultural, multiracial,*



*multinational social order. They sought to prove that ships did not have to be run in the brutal and oppressive ways of the merchant service and the Royal Navy. The dramatist John Gay demonstrated his understanding of all this when, in 'Polly', he had Macheath disguise himself as the black pirate named Morano and sing a song to the tune of 'The World's Turned Upside Down.'*

*The pirate ship was democratic in an undemocratic age. The pirates allowed their captain unquestioned authority in chase and battle, but otherwise insisted that he be 'governed by a Majority.' As one observer noted, 'They permit him to be Captain, on Condition, that they may be Captain over him.' They gave him none of the extra food, the private mess, or the special accommodations routinely claimed by merchant and naval captains. Moreover, as the majority gave, so did it take away, deposing captains for cowardice, for cruelty, for refusing 'to take and plunder English Vessels,' or even for being 'too Gentleman-like.' Captains who dared to exceed their authority were sometimes executed. Most pirates, 'having suffered formerly from the ill-treatment of their officers, provided carefully against any such evil' once they were free to organize the ship after their own hearts. Further limitations on the captain's power were embodied in the person of the quartermaster, who was elected to represent and protect the interests of the crew, and in the institution of the council, the gathering that involved every man on the ship and always constituted its highest authority.*

*The pirate ship was egalitarian in a hierarchical age, as pirates divided their plunder equally, levelling the elaborate structure of pay ranks common to all other maritime employments. Captain and quartermaster received one and one half to two shares of plunder; minor officers and craftsmen were given one and one quarter or one and one half; all others got*

*one share each. Such egalitarianism flowed from material facts. To merchant captains it was galling that 'there is so little Government and Subordination among [pirates], that they are, on Occasion, all Captains, all Leaders.' By expropriating a merchant ship (after a mutiny or a capture), pirates seized the means of maritime production and declared it to be the common property of those who did its work. Rather than working for wages using the tools and larger machine (the ship) owned by a merchant capitalist, pirates abolished the wage and commanded the ship as their own property, sharing equally in the risks of common adventure.*

*Pirates were class-conscious and justice-seeking, taking revenge against merchant captains who tyrannized the common seaman and against royal officials who upheld their prerogative to do so. Indeed, the 'Distribution of Justice' was a specific practice among pirates. After capturing a prize vessel, pirates would 'distribute justice' by inquiring about how the ship's commander treated his crew. They then 'whipp'd and pickled' those 'against whom Complaint was made.' Bartholomew Roberts's crew considered the matter so important that they formally designated one of their men—George Willson, who was no doubt a fierce and lusty man—the 'Dispencer of Justice.' Pirates roughed up and occasionally executed captured captains; a few bragged of their avenging justice upon the gallows. Pirate captain Howell Davis claimed that 'their reasons for going a pirating were to revenge themselves on base Merchants and cruel commanders of Ships.' Still, pirates did not punish captains indiscriminately. They often rewarded the 'honest Fellow that never abused any Sailors' and even offered to let one decent captain 'return with a large sum of Money to London, and bid the Merchants defiance.' Pirates thus stood against the brutal injustices of the merchant shipping industry, with one crew's even claiming to be 'Robbin Hoods Men.'*

*Pirates insisted upon their right to subsistence, the food and drink so often denied aboard the merchant or naval ship—the very shortage that led many sailors to go 'upon the account' in the first place. One mutinous sailor aboard the George Galley in 1724 responded to his captain's orders to furl the mizzen-top by saying, 'in a surly Tone, and with a kind of Disdain, So as we Eat so shall we work.' Other mutineers simply maintained that 'it was not their business to starve,' and that if a captain was making it so, hanging could be little worse. Many observers of pirate life noted the carnivalesque quality of its occasions—the eating, drinking, fiddling, dancing, and merriment—and some considered such 'infinite Disorders' inimical to good discipline at sea. Men who had suffered short or rotten provisions in other maritime employments now ate and drank 'in a wanton and riotous Way,' which was indeed their custom. They conducted so much business 'over a Large Bowl of Punch' that sobriety sometimes brought 'a Man under a Suspicion of being in a Plot against the Commonwealth'—that is, the community of the ship. The very first item in Bartholomew Roberts's articles guaranteed every man 'a Vote in Affairs of Moment' and equal title to fresh provisions and strong liquor. For some who joined, drink 'had been a greater motive . . . than Gold,' and most would have agreed with the motto 'No Adventures to be made without Belly-Timber.' The pirates of the Atlantic thus struggled to assure their health and security, their own self-preservation. The image of the freebooter as a man with a patched eye, a peg leg, and a hook for a hand suggests an essential truth: sailing was a dangerous line of work. Pirates therefore put a portion of all booty into a common fund reserved for those who sustained injuries of lasting effect, whether the loss of eyesight or of any appendage. They tried to provide for the needy.*

*The pirate ship was motley—multinational, multicultural, and multiracial. Governor Nicholas Lawes of Jamaica echoed the thoughts of royal officials everywhere when he*

*called pirates a 'banditti of all nations.' Another Caribbean official agreed: they were 'compounded of all nations.' Black Sam Bellamy's crew of 1717 was 'a mix't multitude of all Country's,' including British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, Native American, and African American, along with two dozen Africans liberated from a slave ship. The main mutineers aboard the George Galley in 1724 were an Englishman, a Welshman, an Irishman, two Scots, two Swedes, and a Dane, all of whom became pirates. Benjamin Evans's crew consisted of men of English, French, Irish, Spanish, and African descent. Pirate James Barrow illustrated the reality of this internationalism as he sat after supper 'prophanely singing . . . Spanish and French Songs out of a Dutch prayer book.' The government often told pirates that 'they [had] no country,' and the pirates themselves agreed: when they hailed other vessels at sea, they emphasized their own rejection of nationality by announcing that they came 'From the Seas.' A colonial official reported to the Council of Trade and Plantations in 1697 that pirates 'acknowledged no countrymen, that they had sold their country and were sure to be hanged if taken, and that they would take no quarter, but do all the mischief they could.' But as a mutineer muttered in 1699, 'it signified nothing what part of the World a man liv'd in, so he Liv'd well.'"*

Gabriel Kuhn, in his book *Life Under The Jolly Roger*, largely agrees with this assessment. He states that:

*"Even non-radical historians concede that the 'pirate communities were ... democracies. A hundred years before the French Revolution, the pirate companies were run on lines in which liberty, equality and brotherhood were the rule rather than the exception.' The buccaneer's society has been called 'the most democratic institution in the world of the*

*seventeenth century,' and 'essentially communistic in its organisation.' Maritime metaphors like 'floating democracy' or 'floating republic' abound."*

Kuhn, however, asks questions that Linebaugh and Rediker, Marxist historians, are never going to ask. Specifically, and usefully for my purposes, Kuhn asks after the relation of piracy to anarchy. A first notable point here is the evidence given by the likely French former buccaneer, Alexandre Exquemelin, who is one of our major sources of information for seventeenth century piracy. In writing out the articles of the Tortuga buccaneers, for example, he writes that anyone found unfaithful after taking the pirate oath of allegiance to their articles "is separated and turned out of the society". In anarchist ears like mine this sounds like the practice of freedom of association or, in this case, the denial of that freedom to those adjudged to have betrayed it and so closed the door to it in the case of a specific pirate community. In this case, Kuhn argues that on the basis of such articles pirates made rules FOR THEMSELVES which others, outsiders, were not expected to adhere to - because they weren't for them. This was SELF-ORGANISATION but it was also oppositional organisation for the values the pirates used were precisely in opposition to those that they might have expected [and many experienced] aboard a merchant or military ship in the service of a state.

Consider, for example, the articles of a pirate Captain Lowther which Gabriel Kuhn reproduces:

i. The Captain is to have two full shares; the master is to have one share and a half; the doctor, mate, gunner and boatswain, one share and a quarter.

- ii. He that shall be found guilty of taking up any unlawful weapon on board the privateer or any prize by us taken, so as to strike or abuse one another in any regard, shall suffer what punishment the Captain and majority of the Company shall think fit.
- iii. He that shall be found guilty of cowardice in the time of engagement shall suffer what punishment the Captain and the Majority shall think fit.
- iv. If any gold, jewels, silver etc., be found on board of any prize or prizes, to the value of a piece-of-eight, and the finder do not deliver it to the quartermaster in the space of 24 hours, shall suffer what punishment the Captain and the Majority shall think fit.
- v. He that is found guilty of gaming, or defrauding another to the value of a shilling, shall suffer what punishment the Captain and majority of the Company shall think fit.
- vi. He that shall have the misfortune to lose a limb, in time of engagement, shall have the sum of £150 sterling, and remain with the company as long as he shall think fit.
- vii. Good quarter to be given when called for.
- viii. He that sees a sail first, shall have the best pistol or small arm on board her.

These, as scholars judge, seem fairly common pirate articles that are reproduced in the articles of others and what they demonstrate is a pirate body that takes important decisions together, shares the booty between themselves relatively equally and has a care to the protection of the group as a whole. Contrast this, for effect, with the forced hierarchy of a merchant or military state naval vessel. The articles evince the mentality of a self-selecting and self-organising group not at all inimical to anarchist ideas of affinity and free association - with a common punishment [as other articles detail more fully] being separation from the community in the action of marooning someone. These were then "marginal men freed from [enforced] social conventions, living beyond restraint except for the few rules they set for themselves." Such "rules" included a

pirates' council, where all important decisions - including who was captain and quartermaster, and what their articles of association were - were made. Pirates were men acting on their own recognisance and to rules of conduct which they were free to either accept or reject for themselves.

We may note that this is already a step up from the State [or the commerce which merchants carry out under its auspices and protection] which presumes to demand and coerce your allegiance as a matter of its right or, if not its right, then its force instead. What's more, although there were several different pirate ships and crews, many scholars report they did not fight or prey upon each other. There was a kind of "brotherhood of the sea" where pirate respected pirate and game respected game. Each might have their own ship and crew but they allowed others to have theirs too without harassment. [We should imagine some occasional swapping of personnel between the various crews as well. After all, these crews were only ever voluntary to begin with.] Nevertheless, we can to a large degree talk about "pirate solidarity" to meaningful effect. This meant that even when sustained conflict among shipmates forced a falling out and separation of the ways [as it always could] the pirate culture of common values and a group ethic of affinity and free association allowed piracy to continue even with newly reconfigured alliances. Freedom to disagree and then to separate was a cherished freedom of the pirates no less than any other but was not one states or the merchants would grant you with their death for deserters. What Gabriel Kuhn emphasises in his account of the pirates is their freely associational collectivism and their anti-authoritarian brotherhood. They are a self-sufficient community of sea rovers who each treasure, and so consequently grant, their own agency - things which seem to have frightened their statist opponents in government. In this sense, as some suggest, we can

see their rebellion of autarkic, sea-born, communal, mutual aid as one of values and not merely practices, like watery versions of the Levellers, Diggers or Ranters of land-based revolutionary ideas.

The most noted, indeed, iconic symbol of pirates and piracy, early in the eighteenth century, became the "Jolly Roger" in which either crossed bones or crossed swords are placed beneath a skull against a black background. [Originally not all flags used exactly the same symbols but it was some combination of similar items against a black background.] Gabriel Kuhn, after Marcus Rediker in his own book *Villains of All Nations*, sees this as a unifying symbol akin to a "gang sign" which was invented to terrify piratical opponents into submission. [Pirates, rather than being blood thirsty killers committed to annihilating every ship, and every sailor, they came upon, actually seem to have used violence as more of a last resort. They much preferred deception, trickery, or terror as means to getting their prey to simply give up their ships and their cargo. After all, in a fight it was certain that several of *your* pirate crew would suffer and die too - maybe even you personally. Thus, it was better all round if prey were simply convinced to give in before an inevitable battle could occur.] It is not known exactly where "Jolly Roger" came from but one theory Kuhn espouses which tickles me in all the right places is that it is a knowing and humorous derivation of the epithet "Old Roger" which was a common moniker for the devil in these times. Pirates were then announcing themselves as a joyous company of autonomous sea devils who would do you in if you didn't give up. That they had their own flag - and not a nation's flag - can be seen as deliberate action by the pirates to describe themselves as men without nation and beyond nation, men who chose THEIR OWN allegiances, men of anti-politics. As Marcus Rediker then states in *Villains of All Nations*:



*"When pirates created a flag of their own, as they did for the first time in the early eighteenth century, they made a new declaration: they would use colors to symbolize the solidarity of a gang of ... outlaws, thousands strong and self-organized in daring ways, in violent opposition to the all-powerful nation-states of the day. By flying the skull and the crossbones, they announced themselves as 'the Villains of all Nations.'"*

Flying such a flag, then, was an act of defiance against the very organisation of the world into nations and states by means of institutional politics to which all people were imagined to belong. It was an outright rejection of this very idea and the presumption to create one's own community, one's own allegiance, to organise yourselves, under one's own flag. It was a claim to be able to make one's own fraternity from one's own freely chosen and arbitrated associations. In this respect it is then interesting that Gabriel Kuhn wants to associate Louise Michel's similar waving and choosing of a black flag in a protest in France in the early 1880s in preference to the more regular socialist red one with the pirate's Jolly Roger. Kuhn thinks this "hard to believe" as something "purely coincidental" and its subsequent adoption as the anarchist flag of choice is then hardly without its own significance. It injects some of that piratical autarkic brotherhood into anarchist affairs at the very least and perhaps suggests yet another self-identifying group of people who refuse the impressed service of the state or commerce and who act arbitrarily in their own interests to create affinities and alliances that states and governments should not control - or even have any part in. In fact, like pirates, shouldn't both of these communities of the black flag then be seen as those who prey upon the state and commerce as private gain, as an act of pillaging and as an act of defiance, an act signifying the invalidity of such organisations of human relations adjudged according to black flag, "anti-political" values which they of themselves invent and maintain?

But such a question then brings me to a more crucial question for my purposes and one which Kuhn also recognises too: Is this anarchy? The "this" under discussion here is, of course, piracy and this question is a common one in pirate literature - regardless of the author's political persuasion. Of course, for some of these writers, "anarchy" will be imagined as something wholly bad and destructive, perhaps something that, politically, they imagine with horror. Yet the equation, or question of their equation, is often made and so is not a question we should be shy of asking, especially not in the context I have created here. So, is "an-argh-chy" a real thing? Can we bring these things together in a profitable and compatible way? As Gabriel Kuhn phrases it: "were the golden age pirates really anarchists?" One obvious [and quite narrow] answer to this question is that they were quite obviously not. In the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries "anarchism", as a conscious political orientation, had not yet either been theorized or invented. But that, as I've already said, is a rather narrow view of anarchy and its one I've not at all been afraid of ignoring before, taking a wider view on anarchy than others as I do. So, looking at things more broadly, this is how Kuhn answers his own question:

*"There appear to be two main ways to respond: 1. If being anarchistic means to live outside the control of the nation-state, or any form of institutionalized authority, then the golden age pirates were surely anarchistic—as much as the nomadic and 'primitive' people they have been compared to. 2. If being anarchistic means to consciously attempt to realize social ideals of universal equality and justice, then the golden age pirates were hardly anarchistic. Too many indications exist that they had no social ideals at all, or at least none that extended beyond a community of 'brothers' who pledged loyalty to one another. If there was an anarchism of golden age pirates, it hence lay in their rejection of institutionalized authority and in attempts at egalitarian community building."*

Here, of course, Kuhn raises an interesting and necessary question of his own [which he himself doesn't ask]: what is anarchy? He seems here to take it to be "consciously attempting to realise social ideals of universal equality and justice" but that is, to say the least, a questionable definition. If, for example, you read the writings of Albert Libertad, E. Armand or Renzo Novatore [or numerous other French and Italian writers between 1880 and 1920, not to mention American-based anarchists in the same time frame such as Benjamin Tucker, Voltairine de Cleyre or even Emma Goldman] is that the definition of anarchy you would emerge with? I doubt it. This question of what we take "anarchy" to be, however, is obviously a key one if we are going to ask about the confluence and compatibility of pirates and piracy with it. Kuhn argues, on the grounds pirates didn't fight for UNIVERSAL social liberty, that then pirates weren't anarchists. But neither E. Armand nor Renzo Novatore [the latter very much a landlubbing pirate of his own kind himself] fought for UNIVERSAL social liberty either - and no one seems to have any problem describing them [or any of the others I named] as anarchists. I myself have made reference to their lives and writings multiple times throughout my time consciously thinking about anarchy and anarchists - and their lack of social concern or requirement for universal equality and justice as a societal metanarrative has not been any deterrent in that respect - as it seems not to be for others either. We may then question if Kuhn's second definition is legitimate and can stand.

In fact, I think his first definition is actually much nearer the mark and cancels out the second, unnecessary definition which Christianises anarchy in a way at least Nietzsche, and subsequent Nietzschean anarchists [this is not an irrelevance as Kuhn himself in the very book I am interacting with here wants to give a Nietzschean reading of pirates later on], would whole-heartedly have disapproved of. What characterises anarchy is its

rejection of "institutionalized authority" and its attempts at creating self-arbitrating, self-organising relations [called, by some, community]. This, as I put it most forthrightly, is a simple matter of the anti-politics of SELF-ORGANISATION. This is the anarchistic principle [one to remember throughout this book, in fact]. And its one, as we have seen, that the pirates embraced entirely as the foundation of their very existence in actions, once carried out, which would destroy any possibility of their fulfilling Kuhn's second definition as actual historical pirate activity actively worked against it. So, no, there was no "anarchist fight for the benefit of *all*" in piracy. *But I do not take that to be anarchy.* I take that to be its turning it into a religion, crusade or dogma, the creation of a spook before which people should bow in order to be inhabited by it. That, in the end, is NOT anarchy; it is anti-anarchy. The pirates were right not to engage in such a fight for their fight was the more anarchist one, the fight for self-made and self-run community, a freedom of relations and associations that respected personal agency and attempted to deal fairly with those who chose to be a part of it in a kind of pirate mutual aid as their direct action. That is anarchy as I understand it. That is pirate an-argh-chy rather than the evangelicalisation and universalisation of the spooks "equality" and "freedom" and "justice". These spooks, in fact, once you are inhabited by them, more often than not only create cops in whatever spaces they are active. They are copthink not anarchy.

Taking Kuhn's fourth chapter, which I have been following here, out of order we can linger on the question of the compatibility [or otherwise] of piracy and anarchy a bit longer. In his sixth section of this chapter Kuhn wants to ask after the "revolutionary, radical and proletarian" credentials of pirates. But, actually, we get a similar assessment as before from Kuhn for, yet again, the distinction made is between having "a conscious all-encompassing political agenda—i.e. an agenda to fundamentally change all of

society's organizational structures" and "contributing to a disruption of society's organizational structures that pose[s] a fundamental threat to the political order". In other words, Kuhn wants, all over again, to contrast actions which simply deny someone's imagined political reality and values, and theories put ahead of oneself which one wants to impress upon the world for oneself. (This I will later term as politics vs anti-politics.) Yet we already know from our discussion here to date that pirates were content to make their own communities and relations based upon pleasing themselves and were not potential or actual benevolent dictators set on "changing the world" and enforcing that state of affairs on others as dictators or tyrants. In fact, any "changing the world" they did was as a consequence of their desire to rule themselves and construct their own networks of relations; it was derivative. Their "revolutionary identity" was thus consequential upon their choices for themselves rather than as a deliberate program conceived to coerce and control others (i.e. it was anti-political). It was revolutionary and radical, then, in its effects but not as a deliberate making of the world whole and entire. They were marginal defiers of convention and law much more than they were those impressing their own versions of these things on society as a whole. (They were kinds of sea guerrillas.)

You will not be surprised to find that I, once again, imagine this to be a very anarchistic thing to do for anarchists themselves, I propose, are not those who want to impress the world to their standards. Even the Italian anarchist communist, Errico Malatesta, as I never tire of saying, believed that anarchy was in the people *emancipating themselves* and NOT in having it forced upon them. Anarchy, like sea-borne piracy, is SELF-ORGANISATION, self-realisation, it is not creating a way the world should be and forcing it into that mould. In fact, that is the opposite of it. So the pirates' marginal defiance of

state power and governmental coercion to certain economic relations is something I regard as authentically anarchist and insurrectional, anti-political activity. Moreover, its an anarchy of practice which pirates make a matter of their life and death, something to which they commit whole-heartedly - and this speaks only to its, and their, credit as a consequence.

Consequently, I find Kuhn's searching for "a self-conscious political aspect" to pirate actions - as if this were necessary in order to validate it as authentically positive political action - a total red herring. The self-conscious political aspect of the pirates' activity WAS THEIR ACTUAL (ANTI-POLITICAL) ACTIVITY. What was political about pirates was their PIRACY and how they went about actualising it as a way of life in the world. It doesn't matter if their targets were "indiscriminate" nor if "they were probably more concerned about their personal freedom... than in saving mankind". "Saving mankind" is for saviours and religions in any case and neither piracy nor anarchy is, nor should be, that. Pirates, as Kuhn finally acknowledges, although without regarding piracy as a legitimate form of "anarchy in itself", were the rejectors of "class society altogether". They were not people who worked for a "working class revolutionary agenda". But I see no problem with that and neither do I see any incompatibility with an anarchy I have distilled down to the principle: "SELF-ORGANISATION". This is the revolutionary pirate radicality. It is this anti-politics of self-created values and practice or it is nothing.

When Kuhn comes to evaluate the "political legacy" of the Golden Age pirates he has concentrated on in his last chapter, however, this doesn't seem to be good enough for him. He writes in this conclusion how his book has repeatedly questioned "unconditionally embracing the golden age pirates as role models for radical politics".

[Indeed, he concludes that it is an "impossibility" to do so.] He describes the two central problems he has with this idea as the pirates' lack of a "wider ethical and political perspective" [basically, and in my terms but not Kuhn's, he wishes pirates had been benevolent dictators, more politicians, who wanted to impress their imagined "just" values upon the world] and, secondly, the pirates' lack of "a level of coordination that could have allowed for establishing a sustainable counterculture and an effective communal defence against their enemies". [Here he seems to wish pirates had become their own state, society and institutional police force.] In both of these points I think Kuhn's basic problem is that he completely misunderstands pirates and piracy [not to mention anarchy] because he wishes to impose his own, incompatible views upon them instead which act as his judge and jury in the matter. He wants politicians but gets anti-politicians.

In the first case, for example, "individual" radicality, or radicality for us who choose it but not for everybody else who doesn't, seems not really radical enough for Gabriel Kuhn. In his discussion of this point, for instance, he betrays his own metanarrative and collectivist allegiances when he says that "theories of liberation stressing the need to liberate yourself (and the rest will follow) build on a strict dichotomy between the individual and society that, in the end, only serves capitalism and the State, as it undermines the collective effort necessary to bring about the fundamental social change needed to free us all." Yet not only is this argument partisan in framing its goal - as the writing of egoists from Stirner to Goldman to Armand - who would argue that your own emancipation is not contingent or consequent on anyone else following - would demonstrate - but what Kuhn neglects to mention here is that no one is forced to want the dogma of "freeing us all" as an imposition upon the world in the first place.

Much less are they committed to what seems such a bloody, unforeseeable [in its outcomes and consequences] and unnecessary fight. Kuhn here simply sets *his* aim and imposes it on everyone. That is a most unanarchistic - and non-piratical - thing to do. Kuhn, in my terms in this book, wants more politics. But pirates and anarchists, so I suggest, do not.

In fact, I think this is simply a misunderstanding - for pirates were not in that position anyway. They were men [almost exclusively!] who found themselves far from home as a result of state violence and impressment who simply wanted a life of freedom instead of the servitude they had previously been forced into (by politics). They grasped an opportunity for freedom and welcomed anyone else who did the same. They made the most of their circumstances. They did not immediately rush headlong to the nearest capital intent on some righteous crusade for universal equality, freedom and justice and, moreover, would have been stupid and doomed to do so. Instead, and in a way comparable to the Diggers, they seem to have taken the view that freedom, and exercising it, is a matter for all of us, an opportunity each can take if they will grasp it in whatever ways please them to do so. And the more the merrier - but certainly not as a dogma or crusade. True liberty, in fact, only comes when one does liberate *oneself* and until one liberates *oneself* (not least from politics) one is never truly free - whatever one's external circumstances. Pirates did liberate themselves, internally and externally, and they welcomed all who did the same as opportunity presented itself. This may not accord with evangelical collectivist dogmas - but then it has no duty to do so anyway.

Such dogmas as these as Kuhn betrays here leak into his second point too for Kuhn seems to judge that, somehow, and in some way not quite explained, what the pirates



achieved was a disappointment or somehow not good enough. (Surely this is for them to decide though?) There is a persistent "if only" in Kuhn's analysis which never seems to go away. This bothers me because it tends to the suggestion that there is some ideal or better destination to which the pirates, or pirates in general, *should* be heading, some utopian ideal or destination which is the actual and real goal of social anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism which the pirates [and, who knows, perhaps most anarchists in Kuhn's mind] fall short of. If this is the case, I reject the idea completely and out of hand. And, in fact, the pirates function as my example of why this is and why it should be as an example of anarchy. Put simply, if anarchy is self-organisation, as I contend, it is then people who get to decide *their own* destinations and the point, purpose and function of *their own* lives and activity. There is NO idealistic utopia to which all "true" radicals or revolutionaries "should" be tending: there is only the one we pick for ourselves for the reason or reasons we find important in so doing. So, yes, Kuhn may be entirely correct to point out that the pirates' way of life could only exist in certain circumstances and was not foresighted enough or well enough arranged to withstand the maritime state persecution which, soon enough, came its way but, taking this point of view on board, SO WHAT? Pirates were living a self-determined, self-organised kind of life. One presumes they were eventually sent to the gallows or the bottom of the sea with the defiant look on their faces of those who had lived and died on their own terms. If anarchy [or, indeed, piracy] means anything, then surely it means the ability and the determination to do that.

Pirates, as Kuhn himself recognises in a section of his fourth chapter, were essentially sea-born guerrillas who lived by expropriation. They were men of "individual conscience" and had to be for this is the only way piracy [and anarchy, in my opinion] can work. You

can't force someone to be a pirate [note how there were punishments prescribed for cowardice or for not whole-heartedly joining in with the drinking culture - pirates wanted to be with men committed to their culture and its protection from the heart] and you can't force someone to be an anarchist (or a guerrilla for that matter) either. These must be things freely given and committed to by people themselves and nothing less will suffice. Such relationships only work if they are mutual and on an equally committed footing. These were the values pirates espoused in the setting up of their ship communities. It seems hard to imagine, however, how this could become the thing Kuhn seems to wish it had become for, as Kuhn himself quotes in his section on pirates as guerrillas, guerrillas are "not an army but small armed groups, intentionally fragmented". Guerrillas exist to attack a far superior force but to engage it on their own terms. They are not formed to be an entire society or, as Kuhn intimates, to exist on a "grand scale". Kuhn has, in fact, already noted in his book that pirates lacked a "revolutionary consciousness" - and presumably he regards this as to their detriment. I, however, do not, for their "revolution" (which was anti-political rather than customarily political) was living life on their own terms rather than in the terms of theoreticians who write books or impose end goals upon society at large under the rubric of modern liberal politics. The pirates' "revolution" was their defiance and their determination to form relationships for their own benefit and run in ways they chose. This, I maintain, is also the anarchist's revolution, their insurrection against an authoritarian world society, too.

Peter Lamborn Wilson [AKA Hakim Bey], in his book *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegades*, raises this point when he argues that "Pirates were very nearly communistic in their pure state." However, pirates, as Lamborn Wilson further remarks:

*"don't fit the Marxist definition of 'social bandit' (i.e., 'primitive revolutionary') because pirates have no 'social' context, no society of peasants for whom they serve as focal elements of resistance. Marxists like [historian Eric] Hobsbawm never include the pirates among their approved 'precursors' of true radicalism because they see the pirates - at best - as individuals involved in resistance simply as a form of self-aggrandizement and primitive accumulation. They forget that groups of pirates formed their own social spheres, and that the 'governments' of these groups (as expressed in ships' 'articles') were both anarchistic in affording maximum individual freedoms, and communistic in eliminating economic hierarchy. The social organization of the pirates has no parallel in any of the states of the 15-18th centuries - except Rabat-Salé. The Republic of Bou Regreg was not a pure pirate utopia, but it was a state founded on piratical principles; in fact, it was the only state ever founded on these principles."*

Peter Lamborn Wilson's book is about a tale to the side of the others I have referenced here [which were about 'European' pirates operating across the Atlantic in general] because it focuses on North African [and necessarily Muslim-influenced] pirates of that region, specifically those of Rabat-Salé [colloquially known as the Sally Rovers] in what is now Morocco. But his point here is well made that many, even scholars with some socially-focused political commitment, often see in pirates nothing but selfish accumulators of personal wealth within a regularised system of politics. They are proto-capitalists rather than proto-anarchists - and this largely because of what they lack - something Gabriel Kuhn himself examples in his own way - which is a necessarily universalising and metanarrative social concern to change the course of history and institutionalise it in ways thought "better", a moralising judgment fully entangled with modern liberal conceptions of politics and its imagined necessary goals.

This analysis, in my view, is simply to ignore what makes pirates into pirates which is what they do and how they go about it - a life of expropriation living on their own recognisance. That is their anti-political model and revolutionary message, one as revolutionary to a Marxist historian as to a governmental official or the chairman of a Board of Trade. Their revolution is "we shall live how we want, for our own benefit and according to our own purposes: we shall organise ourselves". It should be considered by all that this is actually the only real revolution there really ever is. [Don't believe me? Try doing it!] Live for today, live for yourself, live with such as will be brothers and sisters and make common cause. Deny all political institutions. And never try to impose a way of being upon the whole world. In fact, always resist EXACTLY THAT. Be pirates, be guerrillas, be "heretics" [in the words of Peter Lamborn Wilson]. Be participants in a free world where everyone who is free may go wherever they will. That is the anarchy of piracy, an anarchy of agency, of autonomy, of free association, brotherhood and mutual aid, an intentional community of the sea outside the law and beyond the state, an anti-politics in place of politics. This would be what I call instantiating the meanings and values of guerrilla mind.

So far in this book I've discussed a bit about guerrillas and a lot more about pirates. But what about anarchists, the third grouping in my title, more specifically? For that I turn to some of the writing of the contemporary egoist anarchist, Wolfi Landstreicher. In doing so, I am not claiming Landstreicher is a spokesperson for anything - such as "the anarchist faction". I am merely saying he is a modern anarchist, a particularly articulate one, who has some noteworthy points to make. Anarchists, in my estimation, are people who think for themselves and emancipate and articulate their own agency and autonomy anyway [Landstreicher agrees with this] so if you claim allegiance to this description of

yourself but think differently to what comes next in this book then that's quite correctly up to you to articulate otherwise for yourself. I offer only ideas, not dogmas. I imagine, I don't lay down a law I could not [and would not wish to] enforce anyway. I offer you the chance to think for yourself rather than telling you what to think.

So I have so far understood anarchy, and piracy as anarchy, in a certain way. This way is, to my mind, getting at something completely necessary about anarchy: its life as anti-political self-organisation. Self-organisation is an activity, its something you do. If you are not *doing* it then there is no way you are being an anarchist and if you are... well then you just might be. This SELF-organisation also immediately puts you at odds with those, who imagine themselves part of a social hierarchy and above you, that would want to organise you for themselves [as pirates with states]. Self-organisation is then oppositional behaviour, anti-political behaviour, behaviour which opposes those who would organise you. This is major for that could turn out to be all those who feel themselves part of that hierarchical society you find yourself in, the great mass of people in general. Such anarchistic self-organisation is not then about acquiescing or "fitting in" and immediately marks you out as a troublemaker and disobedient. It is an egoistic behaviour for it makes the claim that I will organise myself rather than allow myself to be organised by others, much less conceding their claim to be able to organise you as of right in the first place. It is, as egoist anarchist Wolfi Landstreicher I am turning to discuss now has called it in a series of connected writings that extends over about 10 years from the mid 90s to the mid 2000s, "willful disobedience".

Wolfi Landstreicher [who has also been known as Feral Faun and, latterly, as Apio Ludd in his anarchist existence to date], an American anarchist who has caused a few ripples in

the online anarchist hemisphere [even though he almost entirely - and almost certainly correctly - seems to eschew it himself], states that the purpose of his past publication *Willful Disobedience* was to be "a vehicle for expressing ideas that reflect how I have striven to project my life and my battle against the present social order, with the hope of provoking discussion and discovering new accomplices in rebellion." He further makes the point that it was about "opposing to every form of authority the self-determination of individuals who refuse all domination" and describes it as "insurrectionary" because this stance he takes recognises that authority "must be attacked and destroyed" if we actually want to create lasting lives of our own for ourselves. In some respects, then, this mentality acts as a response to Gabriel Kuhn's complaint about pirates that they didn't think ahead and so got wiped out when the acquisitive capitalist empires got their collective act together in order to destroy these self-organising sea dogs and secure their own way of colonialist, capitalist life via sea-borne hydrarchy. Ironically, it is probably exactly this that Landstreicher, about 300 years later, wishes to attack - and for the reason of self-organisation. He states:

*"Within the present social context our lives as individuals have been made alien to us; the interactions and activities that create this society are not based on the singularity of our unconstrained dreams and desires, but only serve the continuing reproduction of a dominating social order by channeling the energy of desire into that reproduction through a variety of institutions and systems which integrate to form civilized society: the state, capital, work, technology, religion, education, ideology, law... Opposition to this begins when we as individuals rise up in willful disobedience and begin attacking and destroying all institutions of domination, not as a cause, but for ourselves, because we want to create our own games..."*

Not as a cause. As a matter of our will to self-organisation. This seems to be key to the project and the mentality that animates it. It is what, for me, unites guerrillas, pirates and anarchists (and "anti-politics") in this book. What then follows in the collected version of *Willful Disobedience* that I studied and read is five volumes of short, collected pieces and two supplementary volumes given their own titles: "Against the Logic of Submission" and "The Network of Domination". It is fair to say that the pieces themselves do not deviate greatly from central themes and ideas [anarchism is hardly the most theoretical political philosophy in the world to begin with - and egoistic anarchism like Landstreicher's is possibly even less so] and so it makes sense in my explanation of it if I lay out quite simply what sort of attitude and activity Landstreicher in this project is eager to promote. This, as it turns out, will include regular pieces about "projectuality", the need not to turn ourselves into some kind of vanguard, making things consistently about ourselves and our desires rather than the overarching "cause" that Kuhn became obsessed with in evaluating pirates, and acting in revolt and insurrection rather than as some kind of therapy that is an illusion to feel better about ourselves in the bad world we are in. Landstreicher's "willful disobedience" is not then simply a stance which gives us an identity; it is an anti-political activity aimed at changing external circumstances too, not least due to the effects of our egoistic self-consciousness which requires us to act.

Volume one of this project already covers several years worth of what must have been sporadic material, running, as it does, from 1996-1999. It will be instructive to go through this material to see what sort of ground it lays out before us. Already here, in the very first piece, Landstreicher strikes a keynote of his mentality - that we act "without asking permission" [the title of the first piece]. Here it is not a matter of

waiting for "masses and classes" to rise up [historically, this hardly ever happens because it is, of necessity, intrinsically difficult to arrange] but of I myself rising up against them, these being things which are relationships which confine and define me. [This is what Gabriel Kuhn spoke against as not good enough in discussing pirates using his collectivist and metanarrative mentality which comes straight from liberal politics.] We must then, according to Landstreicher, deliberately become "those... who never again want to ask permission" for any course of action in life which we determine, we must stop engaging in "the reproduction of society" which "depends upon our obedience". We must choose the (anti-political) life of willful disobedience that instantiates our life as oppositional to those who would require our obedience in any and all of its forms [like the pirates did and like guerrillas do]. It then follows that "willful disobedience must become an insurrection of unique individuals intent on razing society to the ground" and this is a matter of "stealing your life back", the subject of the second piece, from especially those who seek to control it by means of carefully controlled, economically necessary [for the capitalist], artificial scarcity. In this second piece Landstreicher makes the case that our lives are de-individualised in terms of their agency "in order to maintain social control" and that, consequently, acting without asking permission will involve once more demanding and using that personal agency which social control wants to denude us of. This, put in egoist terms, is your basic anarchist script of direct action and acting directly for yourself in your own interest. It is anti-politics OPPOSED TO politics, its institutions, structures, practices and values.

Landstreicher's ideas about "social control" reappear in a later piece in the first volume of texts where they focus on the family and the education of children. It is Landstreicher's thesis that, under 'normal' circumstances, children are to be turned into



"beings useful to society" [where "society" is here a political mentality in itself and not merely a useful linguistic object] and so society, through the family and education of children, acts to condition children into becoming "members of society" - something which of course means those who are conformed to society too. It is all about creating people determined to accept their enslavement and the humiliations, alienations and inauthenticity which go along with becoming a societal slave. Landstreicher here refers to a "global system of social control" which "compels people to participate in its reproduction in order to guarantee themselves a certain level of survival". It reminds one of slaves who, having been captured, were set to work on the plantations and told to work or die. Consequently, as Landstreicher notes, "As long as the domination of this system seems to be inevitable and eternal, most people will adjust themselves and even feel a resigned contentment with their 'lot'." Rather than accept this "infantile adulthood", however, Landstreicher counsels that "anarchist insurgents need to develop much fiercer, riskier games—games of violent attack against this system of control."

At this point in the first volume of texts, however, we get an interesting aside. In a piece titled "Fear of Conflict", Landstreicher addresses the "fetish for unity" that can afflict anarchist groups of people. [I do not here address socialists, communists, Marxists or "Leftists" generally as they do not concern me. I write as an anarchist for anarchists, as a free spirit for free spirits.] He writes that "it is assumed that 'because we are all anarchists' we must all really want the same thing." But, if you have ever been an anarchist amongst anarchists, even in the toxic, bitterly argumentative online spaces they often create, you know that this is horseshit that is not true at all. Moreover, we might legitimately ask if it SHOULD be true at all. It seems to me that there isn't an anarchist past or present that you can read about who wasn't aware, simultaneous to the

enunciation of their own beliefs and ideas, that there were others over there also claiming the self-description "anarchist" who thought different things and had different ideas about how to go about them. Anarchism is NOT a dogma, a party or a church [so Renzo Novatore]: its a living, breathing, individually-articulated practice of ideas. As I have put it elsewhere before, it is SELF-ORGANISATION. But knowing that anarchy is self-organisation doesn't tell you how to go about your self-organisation. It just tells you what to do, not how. Not only, then, is such a thing difficult to have "unity" about, it almost seems set up to discourage it - for what might self-organisation have to do with unity as a matter of fact or before any other considerations?

As it turns out, Landstreicher is against such a "fetish for unity". Anarchists do not all need to agree on what they think or how they will do anything BEFORE they are allowed to do anything. They do not even all need to agree on anything at all. Anarchy is, well, ANARCHY as I might say it! So, as Landstreicher seems to say here, and as I agree, we need to get past this childish belief that unless we are in agreement something is wrong. It is, in fact, that whole (liberal political) mentality which is wrong and which leads to endless and pointless dialogues in which we try to seek agreement that we never needed to act as anarchists to begin with. Landstreicher insists that we keep our egoism fully intact and argues that in being reduced to the unit of a generality in a forced need for agreement (a value coming direct from political liberalism) all we do is hamper even our ability to ever destroy an authority which itself is based on such a form of social control. Politically liberal society itself, the thing we are fighting against, is about people all agreeing [or being coerced to agree] on how it will progress. Landstreicher's argument here is that it is not just a matter of what it agrees on [and so whether this by itself is judged good or bad, useful or useless] but also of the act of requiring this

agreement to begin with. In other words, the beneficial mentality Landstreicher sees and tries to cultivate here is our acting without permission, our acting for ourselves. I can only assume, on this basis, that Landstreicher would be entirely pro-pirate inasmuch as this is exactly what they did in regard to the society of their day. The markers of authentic revolt against social control that Landstreicher then seeks are relationships based only on "affinities between individuals who insist on making their lives their own" and "the recognition of the singularity of each individual". "The need for agreement", in other words, is a false desire and a product of false thinking should it become a dogma. It is something injurious to our own direct action necessitated by the self-organisational character of anarchy. It is neither guerrilla mind nor the desired anti-politics.

That we are, and actively continue to become, Landstreicher's desired self-organisers, is really the theme of the first volume of texts of *Willful Disobedience*, a volume which ends with musings on "technology" that reveal Landstreicher's unease at our becoming beguiled by it. [I have already mentioned that Landstreicher largely refuses to use the Internet and, as we shall see shortly, he prefers the activity of doing something for himself to the passivity of interaction with capitalist products which reproduce capitalist-authoritarian society in their use.] Landstreicher in fact boldly claims at the start of this final piece of the first volume that "Technology is a social system" and this is, of course, absolutely correct. It is entirely, as he maintains, "a system of relationships that determines the interactions of human beings with each other and with their environment in such a way as to perpetuate the system." So, in criticising technology, it is not that this or that gadget is necessarily bad "in itself" [there is, on this argument, of course, no "in itself" at all], but it is a matter of what networks of relationships one inserts oneself into in so doing and so what ecosystems one helps maintain by one's

participation in them. With technology, then, we should not be tricked into debate about individual gadgets or tools and their usefulness or lack of it, but engage ourselves with systems thinking. A prime example of this that comes immediately to my mind is medical technology. Lots of people will tell you they need or require this or that product of medical science, for example, but rather less of them will be prepared to discuss, or even have the ability to discuss, the massive amount of political and economic activity, as well as social control, which is necessitated in order to produce the thing they say is helpful and that they need. The point here is that there is no consequenceless technology but few people ever seriously address its consequences and the social control of both people and the environment that it includes.

Today, so Landstreicher maintains, we live in a world of "impersonal" and "indirect" social control which acts largely by shaping the environment we live in - and that necessarily technologically. This is authoritarian in nature and exploitative in purpose in our experience of it, an extension of the politics that we are determined to resist. As a result, "Technology quite literally controls the activities of people in their daily lives" from the clocking in and out at work which makes sure we don't "steal time" from our bosses to the algorithmically controlled social media we use which pushes information at us all day long whilst trying to induce us never to look away from the screen. We might think of this latter activity as "recreation", time out from the world, but Landstreicher has thoughts on that too:

*"Even the recreational use of technology—television, computer games, recorded music and so on— is a form of social control. Without even dealing with the social history of these means of entertainment as products of work, one can easily see their role in controlling the*

*activities of people. Through these machines, millions of people take in the ideas and images fed to them, maybe, in the case of computer games, flicking a button or moving a joy-stick in pseudo-interaction with a passively ingested image. None of these passive consumers of entertainment technology are creating their own pleasures, their own interactions, their own lives. None are a threat to authority."*

In that quote, we see the connection with the rest of the first volume of texts: passive consumption is not the self-organisation of a person of direct action, an instantiation of a personally actualised version of anarchy. Instead, it is being lazily induced to fall in with the world through values ingested in passive experiences created by hierarchical and authoritarian capitalism. It is actively working against the creation of a guerrilla mind. A person happy to lay in bed all night shooting prostitutes in the face in some computer game simulation of reality whilst listening to a millionaire croon empty words about "revolution" on their music system is a person not in the streets feeding homeless people, expropriating wealth to support themselves or share with others, or fixing up people's homes with stolen electricity by fixing their meter for them. Landstreicher's plea throughout this first volume is for us to become pro-active individuals intimately concerned with the course of our lives who insist on taking back control of them, who resist "politics" by practising "anti-politics". Landstreicher's point in this first volume of texts is that that is more than merely a mentality: ITS AN ACTIVITY. A constant and consistent activity. Guerrilla mind thinks in order to do and reinforces the thinking by the doing.

And so we come to the second volume of texts which are from the year 2000 and are considerably more in number than the first volume. Here we find texts on morality,

organisation, the point of an anarchist revolution of social life, the need for socially insurrectional action, alienation, institutions, relationships, kinds of thinking and anti-militarism. Also slipped in here are a couple more texts about technology. The impression given, as it should be, is of someone fleshing out his own personal beliefs and expressing them as insurrectionally important ideas and analyses. In the details of these pieces he and I begin to differ in our opinions but neither he nor I would worry about that for - remember - the point of none of this is a "fetish for unity" or "the necessity to agree" but that each of us approaches our life in the world as ours to be articulating and organising for ourselves and according to our own self-educating logic. It is certainly the case that thoughtful, engaged, self-actualised associates with whom we have some affinity can help us with that project - and much fun can be had in so doing. But that doesn't mean we always have to agree with them.

Yet, as Landstreicher starts this second volume with a piece about violence and morality, I find myself in complete agreement with him when he states: "When dealing with the question of how to battle the social order, there is no place for morality." His point seems to be that "democracy" [even in a true form, let alone the stunted, bastardised and corrupted version modern capitalist-authoritarian governments foist upon us] is antipathetic to truly revolutionary purposes. One cannot act in a truly revolutionary way in a democracy because one is coerced to incessant and [at least for democracy's sake] necessary agreement which leads to a life of unceasing compromise that doesn't end up pleasing anybody in an authentic way. Democracy, then, as an aspect of "politics", is a revolution killer. Democracy is that against which true revolutions fight because, and if only because, you didn't choose it: it has been imposed upon you. The moral question comes in here when the question of violence comes into our revolution against imposed

democracy. (Note that neither guerrillas nor pirates – nor some anarchists – have been non-violent.) And this is a question “democracy” itself will push front and centre, imagining it gives the true revolutionary a dilemma: should you be using violence? Is violence to live the life you want to live morally right? (Are guerrillas, pirates and anarchists – or the anti-political in general – immoral?)

This, as Landstreicher agrees, is actually a non-question. Democracy or the State does not set the terms, does not set OUR terms. The whole point of the anarchy that is self-organisation is that WE SET OUR OWN TERMS. The forced, morally-inflected question “Violence or non-violence?” is for us “a meaningless dichotomy”. So, as Landstreicher then goes on to say:

*"The central aim of anarchist activity in the present world is the destruction of the state, of capital and of every other institution of power and authority in order to create the possibility of freedom for every individual to fully realize herself as he sees fit. This is not a moral principle, but simply - by definition - putting anarchy into practice. And it is a violent proposition. No apologies should be made about this. I am talking about the destruction of the entire social order—of civilization, if you will—and such an upheaval is, without question, far more violent than any hurricane or earthquake."*

I want to dwell on this point for a moment, the point that anarchy is not a moral imposition or a moral principle. Anarchy IS NOT MORAL. That will startle some but it shouldn't because, if you think it through [as all too many don't], it should become obviously apparent. Anarchy is not put into practice according to the moral dictates of the State, the moral concerns of its citizens or, in fact, any moral dictates at all. Anarchy,

a political situation of the acknowledgement of no leaders whatsoever, is Alan Moore's "Land Of Do As You Please" from *V for Vendetta*. It is fully realising yourself and your life without outside coercion or determination. This must necessarily include moral determination or moral [as opposed to ethical] consideration. Self-organisation, the operating principle or manner of operation of anarchy, means determining your own course [and its reasons] for yourself without some imaginary external moral framework that sets metanarrative boundaries for you. Does that scare the fuck out of you? Then maybe you are not yet possessed of the guerrilla mind I mentioned earlier! Thus:

*"In this light it becomes clear that we who call ourselves anarchists have no use for dealing with such questions as: 'Is property destruction violence or not?'; 'Is this an act of legitimate self-defense?' and so on. We have no reason to try to make such artificial distinctions, since our actions are determined precisely by our desire to attack and destroy power. These distinctions between 'violence' and 'nonviolence' or between 'legitimate self-defense' and the violence of attack are based in the hypocritical morality of power that serves no other purpose than to place weighted chains on our ability to act."*

These comments, as Landstreicher seems to intimate in his commentary, have to do with American social disorder around the turn of the millennium when pacifist and non-pacifist activists amongst American anarchists [which David Graeber also references in his book *Direct Action*] had several and serial disagreements about what tactics they should carry out [in order to look good when reported on capitalist TV]. Then, apparently, we had the unholy spectacle of one kind of anarchist getting another kind arrested because they were not acting as they wanted them too. Some "anarchism" that sounds like when, in reaction to anarchists being anarchists and organising themselves,



you call the cops you are supposed to not believe in and to have disavowed because you think someone else might make you look bad. I have an increasingly negative amount of love for American anarchists generally and so am happy to example them showing themselves up and hopefully at least some of them realise that acting like police or calling the actual police on others is nothing short of betrayal of the self-description "anarchist", something more than good enough to make you "look bad" in anyone's eyes, not least those of anarchists themselves. Unfortunately, however, [and from my own personal experience] I know that all too many [American] anarchists think the job description 'anarchist' is being a behaviour cop and a thought and speech cop. This mentality has fuck all to do with the self-organisation either I have been talking about serially in my writing or that Wolfi Landstreicher is talking about here. So fuck all you anarchocops out there. Fuck you all the way up the ass. We cannot appeal to any potential audience by apeing the morality of the government or performing nicely for TV. And we shouldn't want to anyway. We should, as Landstreicher says, want to live our own lives according to our own "desires, dreams, capabilities and circumstances". And leave others to do the same in as far as we can.

Perhaps it is then apposite that the next piece Wolfi Landstreicher writes after this is about "organisation". He discusses it in terms of something he describes as "developing an insurrectional anarchist projectuality", something which is about "specific projects of action" and how one might potentially go about these things. All this is tied to the idea that revolution is not something only to talk about; its something someone must do if its ever going to happen for real and not just be a reconfigured more of the same. Here Landstreicher avoids the false path so many take of wanting to create an organisation that seeks membership or the party that wants to create its caucus. If any of this has a

use it is not, according to Landstreicher, useful to the person, or persons, of affinity who want to struggle "for themselves, their ideas and desires." Landstreicher thinks of organisation here more functionally and of what is to be organised as developing "the tools and relationships" and "anarchist methodologies" in order to complete the desired project or action. This kind of organisation is not a thing but a process; it is a matter of knowledge and of affinity but also of relationships between people and things. This perhaps then explains Landstreicher's projectual language for this is all very focused on tasks and what needs to be done. It is a million miles away from "Let's build a party" or "What we need is a large membership group and then we can do something." Once again here the animus is self-organisation. What can I, or we if I find like-minded associates, do for ourselves? This is because "for us revolution is not a cause outside ourselves. It is our life, our fierce desire to embrace the fullness of existence that has been denied to us." Landstreicher emphasises the all-embracing aspect of this task in the next piece, "Politics or Life", when he writes:

*"The decision to rebel against the social order is a decision about the totality of one's life, a decision to refuse precisely that separation which creates politics and activism. Central to this decision is the refusal to let one's life be delegated, the refusal to make demands, because one has chosen to take what one desires, to create what one wants for oneself. The actions one takes are not separate from one's life, but are its passionate outgrowth, springing from the desires and dreams of a free spirit. These actions are aimed at the utter destruction of the social order so that new possibilities of living can be explored by everyone. Thus, they also aim at the destruction of every form of politics including that of the activist."*

What this amounts to in Landstreicher's own rhetoric over several of the following pieces is "revolutionary transformation". The nature of our social situation is a control that "all industrial development" has always taken into account. The development of the State, colonialism, capitalism and the social and economic realities we know all too well today were always ultimately about being able to control society as a whole and orientating it to a particular purpose [the extraction of wealth] via particular means, i.e. the manpower of oppressed others. Thus, as Landstreicher sees it in his analysis, the issue is actually ending, and dismantling, the systems of control [technological, industrial, the system of "work" itself] and so "the end of our proletarianised condition" itself for only this is compatible with the desire to be self-organising people down to the individual level. This is about more than "resistance" since this kind of personal freedom "is best understood as the expansion of possibilities, the destruction of all limits imposed by this or any other social order." Thus, it becomes not just a matter of "organisation" but of "insurrectional anarchist organisation": "bringing together the means and relations that allow us to act for ourselves in the world."

In order to engage in this Landstreicher makes clear that it all begins with "the decision to act". It is a matter, in carrying out any identified actions or projects, of refusing false unities in order to allow space for "real affinities". I have found this out personally in my own anarchist practice. This is not the limp, insipid [and actually dangerous] relationship of the fellow party or club member [who can easily be a spy or a snitch or allow petty differences to result in you being arrested because they've decided they don't like you]. It is the affinity of discussion, argumentation, shared, lived experience and disagreement but where you can look that person naked in the eyes and know for certain that this person is on your side, walks the same road, stands up to be counted with you, and has

your back even as you have theirs. This is not something trivially or simply given. It is not something notional. It can only be lived and develop for real in face to face encounter and the processes of life. Relationships of affinity are, far from the thing they are often portrayed to be, not trivial or superficial, but based in real knowledge of other people that is earned by sweating blood together. No one's trust should be given or earned easily and this is especially true for the anarchist who should expect enemies on every side - for they intend to topple society, and the systems by which it operates, entirely – in and through their own lives. Thus, affinity must be real and it should never just be given away.

This, I assume, is why Wolfi Landstreicher rejects "all formal organisation" and all "structures based on membership" or "the attempt to synchronize struggles" under one formal organisation. The point here is that such organisation is artificial; it is not based on real, lived bonds that have developed between people organically of themselves [such as, for example, the pirate relationships in their communities or as groups of guerrillas would]. Added to this, such organisations develop the tendency to develop dogmas which become canons of membership for the group. This discourages thinking for oneself [intellectual and moral independence] which is actually the tendency we WANT to encourage. Anarchy is not an evangelism or a political party. It is not a matter of numbers or membership. It is not about "keeping people in line" or "accountability" [fuck you, anarchocops!]. Organisations always tend to worry about "the membership" first and keeping people as members second. This is not a revolutionary, insurrectionary anarchism. It is not anti-politics. It does not grow from a fluidity of thought and practice that can only grow in soils watered by independent thought. Such an anarchism only comes, as Landstreicher's analysis also suggests, from a "network of like-minded people"

which should be self-selecting and informally organised [i.e. everything is voluntary and based on voluntarism]. This network focuses not on members but activities and the methods and tools needed for them. It is a way for people to bring their desires to fruition in a situation where many things cannot be achieved alone. Consequently, such a group is highly likely to be temporary and task-oriented. But it means there is no doctrine to ascribe to, no membership statement to sign and no articles of association to be tattooed on your back to which you must be held by judges or cops. It is a way, with others, to become the creators of one's own existence, to organise oneself. *Self-determination is the be all and end all of anarchist organising.*

Keeping the idea of self-determining at the top of one's organising agenda is all important and is to constantly remind oneself that "the revolt against the present order of things originates in the individual desire to create one's life as one sees fit" - as Landstreicher puts this in a piece in the second volume about alienation. What Landstreicher means by "alienation" here is "a social process through which the institutions of social reproduction wrest our creative energy, our capacity to determine the conditions of our existence from us, placing their alienated form (not just as labor power, but as social roles of all sorts as well) at the service of the ruling order." Essentially, then, this is describing the way this politically institutionalised society works to undermine any individual's ability and struggle to realise themselves on their own terms. This issue is taken further by some [such as so-called "primitivists", for example] and made a matter of "civilization" itself. [In the past I have engaged in discussions about civilization which ranged from an almost primitivist desire to see it eradicated to a more considered desire for us to get past certain forms of it, i.e. "post-civilization". These past discussions were almost entirely articulated in terms of those I was interacting with from

John Zerzan to Davids Graeber and Wengrow. The vital issue, it now seems to me, is actually to come to a considered and thoughtful position about what "civilization" actually even is - for as we describe it so we will describe our reasons for or against it.] On civilization Landstreicher has this to say:

*"civilization is not essentially a mindset, a particular ideological system or a fall from Eden. It is something far more concrete: an ensemble of intertwined institutions-the state, the economy, technological systems, religion, the family, the city, etc.-that work together to precisely predetermine the conditions under which we exist, thus alienating our capacity to determine our own lives, producing and reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation. Thus, the revolutionary destruction of civilization would simply be the revolutionary destruction of the institutions through which domination and exploitation are maintained. It would not be a return to a supposed Eden or some alleged original Oneness of being. In fact, it would offer no guarantees. It would simply put the capacity to determine our lives back into our own hands - from there it would be up to us to decide what we would do with it."*

I like Landstreicher's institutional focus here and his further assertion that, as an aspect of yet more of our anti-political direct action which acts without permission, we refuse "every attempt to institutionalize the struggle". In fact, Landstreicher then goes on to write a piece exactly about "Countering Institutions" and begins this by insisting:

*"The method one proposes for carrying out the struggle against the present order reflects the sort of existence one desires. The anarchist project has its origin in the desire of individuals to create their lives for themselves, on the basis of their own passions,*

*inclinations and capacities. This aspiration becomes insurrectional when it confronts the institutions that presently define social relationships and determine the conditions of existence and the individual recognizes the necessity of destroying these institutions in order to realize this desire. The dream of unfettered, self-determined life is the positive impulse that moves us to rebel. But it is not a blueprint for a new social order. It does not provide the answers in advance, but rather raises questions and draws us into the unknown. It presents us with the task of destroying our prison so that we can discover what lies beyond its walls."*

This raises an interesting question, however: should the anarchist, revolutionary, insurrectionist, whatever, know the place they are going to, be able to describe it fully-formed and in minute detail, before they set out to go there? When one is in prison and does not now know what is going on beyond its walls should one require an idea of what should be beyond its walls before one contemplates, or even acts to achieve, their escape? OF COURSE NOT. Such a requirement is simply a further chain placed on the person who is already a captive, an extra bond to keep them imprisoned. Consequently, we must reject this idea out of hand. Yet, as Landstreicher analyses our social situation, we are also in somewhat of a similar situation in relation to social institutions which fetter and undermine us in ways already alluded to but which also exist as the daily means to our own continued ordered existence. The government that oppresses us is also the same government that, such as it is, "keeps the peace", allows trade to continue uninterrupted, keeps utilities running, etc. It is entirely for this reason that governments, which are the locus of dominating power in our modern societies, can say that, without them, everything would be chaos in an act of political blackmail.

As I read Landstreicher on "institutions" he rejects them entirely regardless in a committed example of anti-politics. This includes any institutions of the type Murray Bookchin once mooted since, for Landstreicher at least, "the institutionalization of decision-making is the basic description of socio-political authority." I have never liked Bookchin's "Communist" proposals for exactly just such a reason myself and it always seemed to me as if he just wanted benevolent political bosses or to let some imagined "good guys" run the show in what would be a reformed situation of no real change from an anti-political perspective. What both Landstreicher and I want, however, is no boss at all and no amount of past moaning and name calling by Bookchin [see a lot of his 1990s output] is going to change that. Anarchism, as I think Landstreicher agrees with me, is not "benevolent world government"; it is self-organisation, a very different thing - and, as it is self-organisation, it has no prescription and no one can represent me but I myself. It absolutely can NEVER be the case that any institution acts on my behalf or otherwise organises the communal conditions of life. All that amounts to just another government, another attempt to keep the world much as it is now but replacing people we think of as "baddies" with people we would like to hope were "goodies". It is just more politics and this is a nonsense and a betrayal of anarchy. Anarchy is self-organisation not authorities, something oppositional to any authority, and, consequently, not government [a body or institution invested with authority to govern]. Basically here we must have the courage of our convictions, eschew the institutions and make a go of it according to our own principles. The right attitude, then, is the one that Landstreicher himself describes:

*"the question is not that of what structures to create to replace those we destroy, but of how to go about destroying the present social order in such a way that we transform*



*ourselves into indomitable individuals capable of creating and transforming fluid relationships reflective of our dreams and aspirations."*

We have a very simply expressed guerrilla mentality here then: self-organisation is the aim and self-organisation is its means. We do not need, nor do we as people of principle seek, institutionally constraining channels to our own self-organisation. Our self-organisation is, in fact, a means to our self-organised attacks upon all institutions.

But since Landstreicher eschews any form of government or imagined more benevolent governmental replacements ["institutions"], he needs to provide an alternative and, as already mentioned previously, he does: "relations of affinity". This is something he sees as intimately connected with determining the conditions of OUR OWN existence and so "the capacity for self-organization". But this is something we have to throw ourselves into and participate in for, as already suggested, such relations are not superficial or notional and cannot just happen. Therefore:

*"We need to intentionally create the opportunity for encounters, discussions and debates in which our ideas, aspirations and visions of the revolutionary struggle can come into contention, where real affinities and real conflicts can come out and be developed—not with the aim of finding a unifying middle ground in which every one is equally compromised, but to clarify distinctions and so discover a real basis for creating projects of action that aren't simply playing the role of radical, activist or militant, but that are real reflections of the desires, passions and ideas of those involved."*

The personal connection here is key and needs to be repeated over and over again in our thinking to emphasise its importance. This is not a matter of "the cause" or "a movement". It is something volitional, something desiring, a matter of what we want and are moved by. It is about genuine emotional connections that speak from the heart of our being. This is why Landstreicher goes on to say that "formality undermines the possibility of affinity" for if affinity is a matter of these things, and so genuine connections, then "formality", as something detached and processual, cannot achieve it. Landstreicher re-emphasises this again when he says that:

*"Relationships of affinity are the necessary basis of self-organization on the most basic daily level of struggle and of life. It is the deep and growing knowledge of one another that provides the basis for developing projects of revolt that truly reflect our own aspirations and dreams, for developing a shared struggle that is based in the recognition and, at its best, the passionate enjoyment of our very real and beautiful differences."*

Landstreicher can also give a further reason for relationships of affinity though when he adds: "In the relationship of affinity, a new way of relating free from all roles and every hackneyed social relationship already begins to develop, and with it an apparent unpredictability that the authorities will never understand." If institutions and formal organisations have their processes, their hierarchies and their systematic natures, what they are opposed with is the honesty and reality of true affinity, something which does not rely on a system or overarching organisation at all but the lived bond between people who share their proclivities and their lives in voluntary union. It is, in a way, just like the navies of sovereign countries and the pirate bands that formed from those who had run away from them: voluntarism is stronger than coercion, affinity defeats

oppressive hierarchy or forced relations. The bonds are more authentic and more genuine. They can stand more and they will go further exactly because they are chosen.

So, to repeat, the anarchist point here is to act without permission, to act for ourselves according to our own desires and to join in union with others based on relations of genuine and tested affinity in order to attack the institutionalised status quo. Therefore, as Landstreicher says moving into his series titled "Against the Logic of Submission", "we anarchists consider ourselves to be in revolt at every moment of our lives and attack this social order without worrying whether 'the time is ripe'." Here Landstreicher wishes to describe a necessary attitude which I propose to quote in full:

*"But equally important as the anarchist recognition of the primacy of the actual, living individual (as opposed to the collectivized cog and to the abstract concept of the individual) is the recognition that we need to become a certain sort of being, a being capable of acting on our own terms to realize our own desires and dreams in the face of the most fierce and powerful enemy: this entire civilization—the state, capital, the technological system..."*

*To live as a rebel, as a self-willed anarchist revolutionary, requires a great deal of will, determination and spirit in the face of dizzying odds. Thus, one essential aspect of developing an insurrectional practice is the transformation of oneself into such a spirited, willful being. Such a transformation does not take place through therapy but through attacking the social order both in its manifestations in the world and in oneself and one's relationships. An uncompromising cruelty may prove essential to this task, because there are so many chains to be broken, so many limits to be destroyed. As one comrade has said, the individual quest is 'the appropriation of everything that has been subtracted from him*

*through family, school, institutions, roles, in order to find his specificity, totality, universality, lost... in the process of domestication and the construction of symbolic culture.' So the point is to make the decision to take one's life back in its totality, a decision that requires just the sort of ferocity that will be necessary to demolish this society. And such a decision will transform all one's relationships, demanding a clarity that will leave no room for submission to the demands of social protocol, disrespectful tolerance or pity for those who fear the energy of unchanneled desire more than its suppression. In making this decision (and the decision is only truly made as one acts to realize it), one is completely rejecting the logic of submission that dominates most relationships."*

This reads to me as taking on an existential character. Read, for example, what Landstreicher says in a further essay about this topic, something he imagines as a project of living "a projectual life":

*"At present, so many of us are so careful, so apologetic, ready to distance ourselves from even our most radical and defiant acts. This indicates that we have not yet understood what it means to live our lives projectually. Our actions are still tentative, not full of ourselves, but stepped into lightly with a readiness to withdraw at the least sign risk or danger. Contrarily, the development of an anarchist projectuality requires that one immerse oneself into what one does without holding back, without hedging one's bets. Not that this immersion is ever a finished project. It is a thing in motion, a tension that must be perpetually lived, perpetually grappled with. But it has been proven over and over and over again that hedging one's bets as surely brings defeat as surrender. Having taken this responsibility for our lives, there is no room for half measures. The point is to live without measure. Longer chains are chains nonetheless."*

Thus, it is about more than seeing ourselves as othered versions of capitalist citizens or liberal individuals in a "democratic" world. It is about more than seeing ourselves as members of a state that the world has arbitrarily sorted us into as it assigns us our place (as if it were its place to assign it). This, let us not forget, is the order we should all reject and refuse. It is this order that makes us outlaws and illegal because of who we are and what we want. We are its enemies. But, as Landstreicher himself expresses this thought here, this has consequences in terms of the State and its order:

*"In society's eyes, any refusal of its order is a crime, but this immersion into life moves insurgence beyond the level of crime. At this point, the insurgent has ceased to merely react to the codes, rules and laws of society and has come to determine her actions on his own terms without regard for the social order."*

So the becoming outlaws is true FROM BOTH SIDES. The state makes us outlaws in recognition of our decision to refuse its ways but we nonetheless determine to act in disregard of it even further, and on our own recognisance, at all times anyway. This Landstreicher calls our "projectuality" by which he really means to indicate the mode or character of our life as we live it every day, i.e. as a project in itself. This is the directing of our agency consciously in a certain direction, something that can be met, or rejected, by others as we search for our relations of affinity and it is, as Landstreicher calls it, a "liberated desire". Through this we see affinity as a meeting and union of liberated wills for whatever purposes we have in doing so, a matter of passions as much as reasons. No wonder, then, that Landstreicher here has a piece on "free love" where he says that "The point is to transform ourselves into strong, daring, self-willed, passionate rebels - and, thus, also into strong, daring, self-willed, passionate lovers - and this requires acting

without guilt, regret or pity. This self-transformation is an essential aspect of the revolutionary transformation of the world, and we cannot let it get side-tracked..." This is then about *transforming our reality* and making ourselves the arbiters of our own experience. Landstreicher says that "Free love, like revolution, acts to recreate reality in its own image, the image of a great and dangerous utopia" and to that I say YES!

This, then, is a genuine act of revolt, a life project of revolting against the State in free love and revolution (as I articulate much further in my book *Black Dog: Jolly Roger's Politics for Lovers and Fighters*) and actually amounts, in the title of the last piece of the "Against the Logic of Submission" collection of texts, to "The Subversion of Existence". Landstreicher in fact himself says that "The desire to change the world remains merely an abstract ideal or a political program unless it becomes the will to transform one's own existence" and with this I entirely agree. This is to make your life a "defiance of the present reality" and is "creating one's life as a tension towards freedom" such that it can provide "a context for the actions we take" and act as "a basis for analysis". Landstreicher here notes that "this project is the transformation of existence in a way that destroys all domination and exploitation, it is inherently anti-political" and this means that it is not about degrees of this or that [i.e. power or domination] but is about "our desires for a qualitatively different existence" (for anti-politics is, in this sense, not politics as it has previously been carried on at all). It is expressly about a transformation of our existence which includes external circumstances as well as internal values and realities. The relationships with others we seek are then not just tactics or strategies but things aimed to be exactly actions pursued in such a direction, a matter of the path we are walking. As Landstreicher himself puts this:

*"If our aim is the transformation of existence, then the development of relations of affinity is not just a tactical maneuver. It is the attempt to develop relationships of freedom within the context of struggle. Relationships of freedom develop through a deep and ever increasing knowledge of the other—a knowledge of their ideas, their aspirations, their desires, their capacities, their inclinations. It is a knowledge of similarities, yes, but more significantly, it is a knowledge of differences, because it is at the point of difference that real practical knowledge begins, the knowledge of whether and how one can carry out projects and create life with another. It is for this reason that among ourselves—as in our relationship to that which we are struggling against—it is necessary to avoid the practice of compromise and the constant search for common ground."*

This, I hope you can see, is about *creating new life* as in *new forms of life* which correspond to transformed values and flow from transformed lives. It calls for almost unimaginable honesty in human relations in order to achieve this from those who will always be fighting to change from the people the world created them at first to become into new, different and other kinds of people. It is an act of self-willed transformation that will never end so long as we live in which the temptation to false relations will always be a real and present danger.

But where does that "temptation" come from? In a collection of pieces titled "The Network of Domination" from 2001-2002 Wolfi Landstreicher wants to address this. Here we find pieces about the state, economic arrangements [i.e. capitalism], class, work, technology [and its increasing role in social control], property, religion, the family, prison [and society's increasing nature as an open prison] and, finally, civilization itself. These, put together, are the main elements in what Landstreicher conceives of as a

network of interests which come to dominate and shape society - and so all relationships within it. What links these things together, besides their foul connection in this conspiracy to societal coercion, is that they all stand opposed to ideas of acting on our own recognisance, to our self-organisation and self-determination. If we had this, these things would not stand. In practice, then, they act as barriers to its realisation and this collection of articles very much reminds me of Emma Goldman's similar calling out of opponents in her own essay "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For" where there, in her own context, she lists religion, property and government [the State] as the pre-eminent enemies of individual sovereignty and social harmony.

Landstreicher here, however, begins with the State. Of this he says:

*"The state could not exist if our capacity to determine the conditions of our own existence as individuals in free association with each other had not been taken from us. This dispossession is the fundamental social alienation which provides the basis for all domination and exploitation. This alienation can rightly be traced to the rise of property (I say property as such and not just private property, because from very early on a great deal of property was institutional—owned by the state). Property can be defined as the exclusive claim by certain individuals and institutions over tools, spaces and materials necessary for existence, making them inaccessible to others. This claim is enforced through explicit or implicit violence. No longer free to grasp whatever is necessary for creating their lives, the dispossessed are forced to conform to conditions determined by the self-proclaimed owners of property in order to maintain their existence, which thus becomes an existence in servitude. The state is the institutionalization of this process which transforms*



*the alienation of the capacity of individuals to determine the conditions of their own existence into the accumulation of power into the hands of a few."*

The State, then, Landstreicher sees as the "institutionalisation" of social life itself in effect, the means to standardising and enforcing how people shall live [there is no point in a standard that is not enforced]. The State makes use of laws [which can only ever tell people what not to do - and then only because it will be punished if you are subsequently apprehended for doing it], claims a monopoly on legitimate violence, creates a relationship of subjects to the State [which Landstreicher terms "vassalage"] and engages in "social war" in order to create and maintain this situation whilst, additionally, through political mechanisms which today are propagandised as "democracy", obliging us to engage in political processes it determines in order to affect its outcomes. In fact, of course, this expressly political participation only really acts to get us to voluntarily give away our freedom of action, our acting without permission with which Landstreicher began his articles under the banner of "willful disobedience". Today, of course, many states also exist as pro-capitalist entities if, that is, they are not in fact capitalist entities themselves. Certainly they, and their officers in governments, have relationships with those in business and who run explicitly capitalist operations which synchronise and result in politico-economic interests being served. Just as one company seeks to best its economic opponent and so take the spoil of such war so countries engage in the same fights as supporters and policemen and soldiers of their associated capitalist interests. States then, as necessarily violent actors who seek to deny the right to violence to all others, put the muscle and the threat into contemporary capitalistic arrangements of human relations and ally themselves with capital in explicitly political, and politicised, ways.

If states are going to survive, however, then the mass of people at large must be given something to do other than thinking of ways, or having the time to think of ways, to destroy them. One thing states achieved in arriving at their present state was the robbing of millions of people of the capacity "to determine the conditions of their own existence". This was an action not just necessary to the survival of the State but also to the increasing rise of capitalism as an increasingly unimpeachable practice of human relations. What both together achieve, as Landstreicher notes, is to make it virtually impossible for most people to create the lives and relationships they might desire if they had a choice. These two entities work together to restrict that choice and, if possible, to force only one choice - that of the societal drone coerced to capitalism and states. For such people the economic reality of life is that "Our lives have been divided into units of measured time that we are compelled to sell in order to buy back our survival in the form of bits of the stolen lives of others that production has transformed into commodities for sale. This is economic reality." The three "most fundamental institutions" of this reality Landstreicher delineates as "property, commodity exchange and work". The result of all this is that, essentially, most people are turned into wage slaves, people who must work under capitalist conditions in order to live under a rule of capitalist economy. As Admiral Ackbar might've said, "Its a trap!"

This trap has several aspects, however. The first is class which, at a basic level on an economic scale, can be split into the dispossessed and those who possess the wealth [the haves and the have nots]. Obviously the dispossessed number a lot more and so, equally obviously, they need to be kept under control and occupied lest they realise their vast numerical advantage and the power to act for themselves that it hides. [Here mass media, owned and controlled by billionaires, does its duty keeping people occupied and

fighting amongst themselves, never with their eyes on the actual target and always ripe for a new distraction – one very good reason why you should never use it.] What one could get here is some kind of class narrative such as socialism or Marxism provide but, aside from the obvious truth that most people are dispossessed and deliberately hampered in this society from acting for themselves, these have never really appealed to me since I do not identify myself as the member of a class, dispossessed or otherwise. My aim is not to take control of the means of production, or some such, but to decide my own life generally, without overseers of any kind. Landstreicher takes much the same approach when he writes:

*"Because there is no common positive project to be found in our condition as proletarians—as the exploited and dispossessed—our project must be the struggle to destroy our proletarian condition, to put an end to our dispossession. The essence of what we have lost is not control over the means of production or of material wealth; it is our lives themselves, our capacity to create our existence in terms of our own needs and desires. Thus, our struggle finds its terrain everywhere, at all times. Our aim is to destroy everything that keeps our lives from us: capital, the state, the industrial and post-industrial technological apparatus, work, sacrifice, ideology, every organization that tries to usurp our struggle, in short, all systems of control."*

In other words, our struggle is not simply to "take charge" where "take charge" refers to anything past our own lives. Landstreicher's vision, again as mine, is a free network of human interactions where all these human beings are responsible for their own lives and decisions in a context of free association. Here he talks about developing "new ways of relating based on self-organisation" - which is exactly the point. If this were put into

practice then "taking charge" at the macro-level of the State would cease to exist all by itself and corporations would collapse overnight as human beings insisted on their egoistic will to self-determination. Instead of living under centralising control, things would automatically decentralise as the effect of this activity.

It is to belay this possibility, however, that the "deadly alienation of our existence" under oppressive capitalist authoritarianism takes place. It is a system of relations determined to undermine our ability to live and act for ourselves. It literally wants to determine your day and remove choice from you - starting with when you get up. It wants most of your day to be filled with work and so to take place at the behest of a boss and this organisation of human life literally gives you no time but to do what's required to keep this job which has been manufactured as your daily means of survival. Do what your boss says and keep him pleased otherwise you might lose your job. [So keep a bottle handy to piss in so that you are not pulled up for taking a toilet break.] In a machine world human beings essentially become machine parts and large numbers of people today are essentially parts on a production line just making sure various processes continue to take place. If they could be replaced by actual machines they would be [as those from car plant workers to checkout people in supermarkets have been] and its only because other machines haven't been invented yet that they aren't. Doesn't that make you feel valuable? Its not really so different from the colonial plantations where slaves were forced to work or die. Today, in most places, we cannot make people work or die directly anymore so a system had to be invented which essentially does the same thing but more indirectly. Capitalism today robs you of your life and forces you to work at a job for a boss to survive. Your boss is, in this case, not going to kill you if you don't work but he

will carry on, unconcerned, if you don't work and die as a consequence of your poverty or by being severely hampered in your ability to participate in a capitalist society.

On numerous occasions Wolfi Landstreicher, in such discussions, points out how "an integrated system of techniques, machinery, people and materials" that has been created through political and economic means [by creating certain standard relationships] has been "designed to reproduce the social relationships that prolong and advance its existence." This extends to technology which Landstreicher sees as "reproducing" relationships "in accordance with the needs of the ruling system". Here we see the importance of not just how we act or what we want but how we relate with anybody - for it is in this relating that our society is created. It is then also in this relating that our form of life is created and what is and is not possible is found. Under authoritarian capitalism [my conjunction and shorthand for the dominant political and economic thinking of our day] relationships are formed in order to perpetuate social control. It follows, as consequence, that what is created by that system is a function of that system and in order to further or reproduce it even more so. Thus:

*"the industrial system was not simply (or even primarily) developed because it was a more efficient way for manufacturing goods. Capitalists are not particularly interested in the manufacturing of goods as such. Rather they manufacture goods simply as a necessary part of the process of expanding capital, creating profit and maintaining their control over wealth and power. Thus, the factory system—this integration of techniques, machines, tools, people and resources that is technology as we know it—was developed as a means for controlling the most volatile part of the production process— the human worker."*

The key point to note here is that technology is not "neutral" - as so many of its advocates try to trick us into believing. It is, in fact and in modern understanding of the term in terms of what it actually produces, "part of the structures of domination". In many cases it is an aid to the domination - and not here simply in terms of human surveillance but of the domination of the planet, and its resources, by human beings.

This is a book about thinking, however, and none of this would be possible but for the thoughts that we allow ourselves to be inhabited by. One absolutely key thought here is "property". Property is itself, even at its most basic level, an assumption. Why, for example, would someone imagine that they can own land? What about their relation to a given piece of land [land, of course, does not itself come in "pieces" but is simply continuous] makes them think it is "theirs"? Historically, however, and not least as a key precursor to the creation of capitalist states, people absolutely did imagine that land could be owned and that this ownership gave rights to some and took them away from others. [We have already seen earlier in this book how that move is vital if you want to make lots of people dependent on work for others in order to survive, a move which creates a mass of people ripe for exploitation and coercion.] The fact is that, in order to create this prison of states and capital people have absolutely had to imagine that they could own things exclusively and enforce those ownership rights onto others. Capitalism wouldn't work at all unless they did. It is because "this is mine and not yours" that you are forced to struggle for "yours". If this was neither mine nor yours then anyone could use it and people might even quite willingly share it [since no one would imagine they owned it].

Property, then, is not really about ownership or possession. Its about relationship. As Landstreicher explains this:

*"we must look at property as a social relationship between things and people mediated by the state and the market. The institution of property could not exist without the state that concentrates power into institutions of domination. Without the laws, the arms, the cops and the courts, property would have no real basis, no force to support it. In fact, it could be said that the state is itself the instituting of property. What is the state if not a network of institutions through which control over a particular territory and its resources is asserted and maintained by force of arms? All property is ultimately state property since it exists only by permission and under the protection of the state."*

I like this last point and the analysis it examples. Because we have invented property and states to be the things we think them to be today, in effect all property is state property since the State can at any time make the claim that this particular piece of property is *its* property - and can act to seize it. Once you accept that then you are basically saying that all property is guaranteed by the State and is only really on loan to anyone else in lieu of the State deciding it is its own. But what you are then saying is that property is where the State's presence as an actor which aims to disable your own ability to act for yourself begins and ends. "Property" is actually the border of the State - as Landstreicher has it. You can't just walk into a store, take what food and other goods you need to survive and remain healthy, without paying for it - and even if its an emergency that you need it. Everything in that store is "property" and so under the State's protection. The State insists on rules of relationship between people thought of as actual or potential property owners and requires a certain relationship between them which constrains our

ability to act for ourselves. You can't, as Gerrard Winstanley soon found out in mid-seventeenth century England, just turn up on a piece of land and start building a house and planting crops. If you could, capitalism would be dead in the water as people provided for themselves from their own efforts (something they could always do, given a chance to). The trifecta of state, capitalism and property is how that ability is, in fact, fatally undermined as it institutes that the State's permission is required in order to act in a context in which ways of relating to and with each other is strictly controlled. Thus, "the world of property, ruled by the market and the state, is an impoverished world where lack, not satisfaction, permeates existence." This "lack" is deliberately created in order to control. So, consequently and ultimately:

*"we must attack the institution of property, every physical, legal, moral or social fence. This attack begins from the desire we each have to take back our life and determine it on our own terms. Every moment and every space we steal back from this society of production and consumption provides us with a weapon for expanding this struggle. But, as one comrade wrote: '...this struggle is widespread or it is nothing. Only when looting becomes a large-scale practice, when the gift arms itself against exchange value, when relationships are no longer mediated by commodities and individuals give their own value to things, only then does the destruction of the market and of money – that's all one with the demolition of the state and every hierarchy – become a real possibility', and with it the destruction of property. The individual revolt against the world of property must expand into a social revolution that will break down every fence and open every possibility for individual realization."*



This is why things like open commensality, mutual aid and giving things as gifts (which I will discuss more below under the rubric "anarchist economy") are revolutionary ways of thinking which attack and, where practised, destroy our present coercive relationships - for they introduce new ways to act with each other. Practised habitually, they would reconfigure property and destroy capitalism because these practices require things to be exclusive and controlled rather than open and free. Refusing to count the cost destroys the mentality of "everything has a price" because if you don't count the cost then nothing has a price. If you share then deliberate collusion to maintain scarcity or exclusivity is swept aside. We can behave differently towards each other and maintain different relations between ourselves. We have simply been taught otherwise and forced, on ultimate pain of violence, to maintain certain relations between ourselves and ignore others. Capitalist society, which is authoritarian and hierarchical, is a political, economic, moral and intellectual prison - and there are lots of both voluntary and coerced prison guards making sure we behave as required.

Historically, some of these guards have been religious - which is a subject Wolfi Landstreicher also addresses. The two points I take from his analysis of this in his piece are that, first, the history of religion is really a history of property and the State as religious institutions, perhaps whilst focusing on kingdoms of heaven, went about building, or colluding with, kingdoms on earth and, second, their focus on "the sacred" is actually a focus on things they have themselves consecrated. In both of these activities we see how religion, like states, acts to constrain the free will of people at large, denuding them of their ability to self-organise, both materially and morally/intellectually. Under the guise of the spiritually consequential, they behave in ways very temporally consequential. One of the major ways they have done this,

historically speaking, is through promotion of "the family", another subject Landstreicher addresses. The family is perhaps the most insidious institution in any of our lives because it is both so intimate and immediate, the reason any of us are actually alive to begin with. But that does not make it any less controlling or potentially dangerous to the goal of "self-organisation". Everyone will know, for example, how there is a tendency in parents to regard their children as their possessions and things to be dominated and bent to their will. Aside from the obvious effects of this, we might ask what it teaches the child subject to it. The family is, then, easily characterised as both dominating and hierarchical [the latter being a word taken from religion in that it originally referred to an order of priests] but can also fulfil the role Landstreicher often refers to of the institution which exists to reproduce the relations apparent in society. Obviously, in capitalist-authoritarian times this is not a good thing but no relation is beneficial to the principle of self-organisation if it imagines that one family member is the head of others or a male is the head of a female, etc. Thus, even in our most intimate relations of love and family inauthentic and dangerous ideas can flourish if we allow them to. Even such relations can promote politics rather than a necessary anti-politics.

All such relations, in modern context, are in fact consequent on the PRISON SOCIETY we have built as Benthamite ideas of panopticons became enculturated lived realities. There are, for example, plenty of buildings, including private homes, in my neighbourhood, as I'm sure there are in yours, which have "security cameras". Some of these are "Ring" cameras that are associated with the company Amazon who, in some jurisdictions, have shared their footage with police departments. Such devices, along with publicly funded and sited cameras, essentially become part of a 24 hour surveillance culture of devices which are constantly reporting on public activities. [Of course, when Landstreicher was

originally writing we were not yet quite at the broadband age and so streaming surveillance footage of public activities was at that time not possible. But he does include a footnote warning about the potential for police departments, and others, to track us through cellular phones. Now, of course, our phones, should we have them - and I don't - can track us and tell anyone with the authority to want to know who we are by cross-checking every search, browser use and message sent that we have ever made. Our phones can contain all our personal details and betray everywhere we've been and everything we've done in a huge capitalist-inspired move towards betraying ourselves. It is sometimes said, in fact, that various secret services have a "record everything" mentality in regard to the proliferation of electronic devices now in service which can track and record us.] We, as a society, have been bought off and induced to tell on ourselves.

All this amounts to a prison society, the product of mentalities of social control which see personal agency as the problem to be combatted and replicating prison conditions in public society as the solution to this problem. Never before has society had so many examples of cameras, recording devices, trackers, surveillance equipment, armed guards, police and computer analysis of public movements at its disposal in order to manage social and even private activity. As Wolfi Landstreicher saw it even in 2002 when writing about this, this "methodology of imprisonment", which is one with a methodology of police and policing, is gradually, and consistently, "being imposed over the whole social landscape". As Landstreicher then goes on to note himself, in addition, the target of all this activity is US, every one of us, the ordinary Joe or Josephine. We are ALL watched and not just some, the so-called "dangerous" ones who might do things "we" don't want them to do. We are ALL watched, all monitored, all under suspicion. Allied to a class

analysis of this, we might say that the haves are monitoring the have nots or the privileged are using their power to monitor the underprivileged. If you wish to dispute this analysis ask yourself what rights YOU have to monitor anyone or put them under your surveillance, let alone what ability you have. If you wish to monitor a billionaire like Elon Musk, for example, as people have tried to do in relation to his private planes, he very quickly becomes agitated about it and threatens all kinds of retribution, claiming it puts him in danger [even though this information is publicly available anyway as a matter of air traffic information]. But he doesn't like it. Well then why should we like it of us any more than he does? Is privacy only for the billionaires?

The issue here, as Landstreicher contends, is that:

*"From the perspective of the rulers of this world, we are, indeed, all criminals (at least potentially), all monsters threatening their tranquil sleep, because we are all potentially capable of seeing through the veil of the law and choosing to ignore it and take back the moments of our lives whenever we can on our own terms."*

Self-organisation [which in this case can also be described as either autonomy or agency] is an ever-present threat to those who want to organise others and make self-organisation impossible. (Anti-politics is, then, a standing threat to politics as it is habitually done.) So all those who may spontaneously decide to self-organise are then to be regarded as a threat to the self-designated organisers - just like, earlier on in this book, the sailors were a potential threat to the navies they wanted to desert from in the seventeenth century but were prevented from doing so by the threat of violence and death. What one can say about this is that such a system cannot be reformed. One

cannot keep this system but make it a bit nicer (as even some anarchists have pretended to imagine – always in error). The prison is the prison regardless of any small comforts or niceties and the person who simply requires their freedom from prison walls will accept nothing less than freedom from its constraints and the opportunity to take their life into their own hands and live on their own terms. Consequently, the prison society, as a very idea and at its foundations, must be attacked and its destruction, escape from its clutches, is our only possible destination as practitioners of anarchist anti-politics.

As an "afterword" to all this commentary on "the network of domination" Landstreicher offers a few short thoughts on "civilization" - on the basis that all he has so far discussed in this mini-collection of texts actually really amounts to civilization itself. But, as Landstreicher rightly diagnoses, the problem here is exactly what we think "civilization" actually is to begin with, a thorny problem many attempt to wrestle with. Here Landstreicher comes to the conclusion that civilization is "a network of institutions, structures and systems that impose social relationships of domination and exploitation" or, in other words, is a society "comprised of the state, property, religion (or in modern societies, ideology), law, the patriarchal family, commodity exchange, class rule — everything we, as anarchists, oppose." Putting it yet another way, Landstreicher adds that "what all civilized societies have in common is the systematic expropriation of the lives of those who live within them" and what it amounts to, for him, is the "domestication" of the mass of people in such societies. Therefore, "Civilization is thus the systematic and institutionalized domestication of the vast majority of people in a society by the few who are served by the network of domination." This is all very neat and tidy in terms of Landstreicher's own rhetoric and it balances up nicely with a desire to promote "becoming uncontrollable individuals capable of making and carrying out the

decisions that affect our lives in free association with others." But is it a useful definition of "civilization"?

If you have read David Graeber and David Wengrow's various writings over several years, and especially their book written together, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, the answer is certainly not. All Landstreicher has done is list civilization's failures and take them for the whole. Against such things, and such civilizations, all freedom-loving anarchists would pour scorn and pledge their revolt against them. But Graeber and Wengrow, in their book, say that civilization doesn't have to be like that and they posit times and places in the human past when it wasn't, adding in what is needed to make civilization a positive experience to the pot as they go. Surely Landstreicher's own arguments suggest that people interacting with each other that come to amount to societies and civilizations need not always exhibit the networks of domination Landstreicher has here detailed? What else are we imagining in terms of positive possibilities if not that civilizations could potentially be other than that which our current experience of them is?

The issue here is that Landstreicher cannot imagine any civilization that, in his words, accommodates "the reappropriation of life by individuals who have been exploited, dispossessed and dominated". He largely equates "civilization" with "institution" and sees this as a necessarily constraining, controlling entity that fetters the possibility for self-organisation. Graeber and Wengrow, on the other hand, as folks much more open to ideas such as those put forward for imagined emancipatory civilizations by people like Murray Bookchin [one of the chapter titles in their book is even "the ecology of freedom", itself a title of one of Bookchin's most famous books], do not take the worst

examples and possibilities of civilization for the phenomenon as a whole. They can imagine [and, if talking about past examples they have discovered, call up from an imagined past] much more emancipatory civilizations than Landstreicher finds himself capable of. In this, I find myself torn, having in the past spoken to both agendas.

In the end, however, I still eventually come down in favour of Landstreicher and I do so on the basis of asking the question "Is a civilization, thought of as what Landstreicher calls a 'universal social model' even desirable?" My answer to that question is "No" as Landstreicher's "innumerable [social] experiments varying drastically from place to place and changing over time" seems far more reflective of the ethos of relations marked by autonomy, agency, free association, affinity and decentralisation [i.e. self-organisation] that I have spoken to before. They seem more about "anti-politics" than "politics" to me. Whether a uniform model of social relations could ever now be benevolent or not, and there will continue to be anarchists like Bookchin and Graeber, both now deceased, who continue to imagine so, it seems to me that the priority is keeping the idea of self-organisation before us, regardless of form, even if that only ever results in numerous endless experiments in bringing it to fruition in human relations in the face of oppressive attempts to control the whole social sphere. In other words, self-organisation, as an expression of anarchy and anti-politics, is the principle we seek to enculturate whether it ends up in a civilization or not. A universal *organisation* is NOT an anarchist goal.

I need to cut my tour through Wolfi Landstreicher's *Willful Disobedience* short now, however, and round this all up lest I outstay my welcome and go on for far too long. I have, so far, provided some opening, and connecting, thoughts on guerrillas [and guerrilla mind], on pirates and their piracy, and on anarchy and acting like an anarchist. I

see connections and similarities between them and some I have brought out. But I have not brought them all out, or extrapolated too far in regard to them, and so I leave these descriptions open so that readers may think for themselves about similarities and differences in regard to them and their contexts. The key point I am trying to get across here in this book is their common focus, to my mind, on intellectual, moral, social, economic and political independence, and on these sorts of independence as the basis for living life oppositionally to the dominant powers of this world. (In my mind this equals practising anti-politics.) This is, as I then suggest, about thinking oppositionally to the way the authoritarian society which you live in wants to organise you. This book, playing its part in that task, is then about anarchy in every respect and so it is about *self-organisation* in every respect. That's why this book in fact discusses guerrillas, pirates and what an anarchist is and does. If you have that thought clear, and perhaps some ideas about where we might take that that are beginning to form already like seeds in your developing guerrilla mind, then perhaps we can actually begin with this activity for real and live it out authentically in lives of free spirit?

This is what my “manifesto of anti-politics” is to be about in rounding out this book. Let me start by interacting, once again, with the seven “articles of Jolly Roger’s anarchy” that I composed in a much bigger book I wrote called *Black Flag*. There I tried to encapsulate my understanding of anarchy as a piratical, guerrilla-like, anti-politics under the rubric of the following articles:

- i. Hold nothing sacred and, in so doing, destroy all authority.
- ii. Agency, autonomy and free association are the lived basis of authentic social life.
- iii. “Self-organisation” is our principle of life and anarchy described.



- iv. If something is not voluntary then it should not be done.
- v. Creating relationships which help others is also helping yourselves.
- vi. To get out of the prison, think yourself out of it – and then act accordingly.
- vii. Everything is a fiction.

Imagine these articles exactly as I explained earlier when discussing pirates – as “articles of association” or “principles of common agreement”. If you agree with these seven ideas then you are saying you could potentially live and work with other people who also agreed with them. Since I first thought of them some time ago I have had cause to quote them a few times and each time I have questioned them, wondering, with a customary lack of confidence, whether I hadn’t perhaps made a mistake or gone wrong somewhere. Perhaps I’ve also left something out? In ever composing them I was trying (rather ambitiously in all likelihood) to encompass the anarchist mentality I had discussed in almost 2,000 pages in the book *Black Flag* in as few articles as possible, a way of summing up an anti-politics. Perhaps a few words are in order at this time, in that case, in order to explain the mentality behind the articles that I came up with and to recommend them to you, my readers, once again.

The first article could really be seen as “no gods, no masters”, a famous anarchist slogan. But I have tried to make it more specific and all-encompassing than that. Our danger in a world of oppression and coercion is authority that wants to control – and this is everywhere, not least in political and economic spheres (which are linked). But “hold NOTHING sacred” really does mean “nothing”. And it means moral and intellectual things as much as political and economic things. It means starting from scratch and honouring nothing you were in receipt of by virtue of the life you were born into. Not holding

things sacred is also something that must be learned and trained for: you must live it and attune yourself to it as a discipline. It is not, like some things, a mere head belief. In the first three sections of this book I have focused on types of people who are doers and not merely believers. Believers belong in churches where they can spend time imagining and pretending and worshipping: we want doers. We want people who focus on their current lives and situations to the detriment of fossilised beliefs and values. We live to suit ourselves - and that according to our own values. But we try not to hold them sacred either. Our values should not become dogmas and must be always open to question, or to change, according to our needs and our contexts. Anarchism is pragmatism (just like piracy was and like being a guerrilla is). So we should get out of the habit of having dogmas, authorities of choice, and such like, in order to become self-determining, self-directed people. And this is not merely a singular thing, its a social thing too. Its autonomy AND association not autonomy OR association. It is the belief that you (plural and singular) are the best person to decide what you do and how you should live. And it guards that belief jealously against all coercions to centralisation of power and influence.

Another thing to say about my articles is that I see them as rooted in biology - for life, in my estimation, is quite literally self-organisation at the biological level. This metaphor extends through the fifth article where cooperation and mutuality are seen as beneficial (I will have much more to say about this below when thinking about an anarchist economics). When Cole Porter originally wrote the song "Let's Do It" ("birds do it, bees do it. Even educated fleas do it") he was talking about love but if he'd added in trees to birds, bees and fleas he could have been talking about self-organisation which is at the heart of everything I am saying about both anarchy and anti-politics (to which I will come

shortly). This is not a selfish self-organisation in the abstract and it is one which takes account of one's surroundings and one's context, being cognisant of others. There is a reason everything in a forest, for example, is an inter-connected set of relationships, why species (often not even the same species) work together to create a very particular forest environment. It is because every form of life is helped out if these relationships are formed. Things could surely just all go their own way. But then the environment would be different and everything (or nearly everything) would die. There is, then, more to life than any of us in isolation.

This is also true in the context of my sixth article which posits our life situation as a "prison". Prisons, of course, don't have to have walls as we just saw when discussing the thoughts of Wolfi Landstreicher. A prison of relationships will do just as well and often, in the world we have all been fated to, these relationships are just as effective as walls at keeping out and locking in. My formulation of this issue in my articles, however, posits this as somewhat of a mental prison as much as a material one. (Hence why "guerrilla mind" is necessary at all!) It imagines we can think ourselves out of the prison (and then act upon our new frame of mind). This is how revolutions and insurrections start, when people simply refuse to accept the premises they are presented with or imagine new human relationships or freedoms others deny are possible. Here my final article comes into play, the intriguing "everything is a fiction". This might sound nihilistic and I would not at all deny that it is. But in voids one can make of things what one will and one is not constrained by authorities that have now been seen through, as blinds for the eyes or padlocks for the mind. My final article is saying that EVERYBODY IS TELLING A STORY but not everyone is telling the same story. Some are stories of necessary oppression and coercion, others are stories of freedom and liberty. Some are stories of the control of

others, whilst other stories are about freedom from control. Either way, however, they are all stories so NO ONE should go turning them into dogmas either.

One story we have been told in Europe for several hundred years now is the story of liberal politics and the Nation State. We are told (even in books which come out year after year) that both liberal politics (often discussed under the sub-heading “democracy” and centred on elections for people’s representatives) and the Nation State are both irreplaceable if we want to live in a world populated by justice and fairness. To be honest, I have no idea how people can still write books today that follow this thesis for can there be anyone left who truly believes it? Can there be anyone left who seriously thinks of elections and States and thinks, “Ah yes, thank goodness they exist. That’s where all this fairness and justice is coming from”? On the contrary, if our eyes are open we now know very well that liberal politics and nation states produce neither fairness nor justice – and often work to prosper and bake in the opposite. These things offer to the citizen the prospect of politics (here, and throughout this book, an institutional way of doing things in my usage) as the means to the solution of their problems when, in fact, this way is the means to the entrenchment of the problems they might want to solve. Liberal politics and nation states entrench people in social, political and economic hierarchies these things do nothing to mitigate. We are expressly told, in fact, by liberal politics and nation states that authority is vital and necessary to any hope of societal justice or fairness – indeed even almost as if it were the only way. But this is not true so let me develop this thought a little further.

I once wrote a book called *Being Human* and, as it happens, it was my first attempt to write a book about anarchism. A distinctive of *Being Human* was that I set out anarchism

as a matter of values rather than theories, places or plans. This is not to say that places, plans and theories cannot have their place within an active anarchism; it is to say that it is the virtues or values we have as human beings that matter and which will determine the rest (this also relates to “anti-politics” as we shall see). Its more important, in other words, to be a person possessed of certain values or virtues than it is to have a plan or be in a certain place or to know a particular theory. At least, it is as I understand things. This prioritisation in my own thinking led me to set out a list of virtues/values that I regarded as distinctively anarchist when put together. I introduced them in *Being Human* as “Anarchist Virtues and Values [always implying an action]”. These were:

1. People not property
2. A freedom of equals (“I am not free if someone else is not free”)
3. Cooperation/solidarity
4. Fraternity
5. Subversion (of “the system” – whatever that system is)
6. Commensality, Mutual Aid and The Gift (i.e. anarchist economy)
7. Democracy (in the sense “one person with a non-transferable right of representation”)
8. Education
9. Responsibility

Here, for my purposes in this book, I am going to concentrate mainly on the sixth item from that list, things which in *Being Human* I described as the basis of an “anarchist economy”. This takes seriously the idea, as it must, that if capitalism ended tomorrow - and we collectively sorely need it to — then this does not mean that, thereafter, people would just stand around, finding it impossible to carry on life and human interaction

without being capitalistic about it. The “capitalism is inevitable” story is one of the capitalists’ greatest propaganda weapons but it is completely ahistorical rubbish. It is not true capitalism has always existed and neither is it true that it is the only way for people to live. But even if it were true this “truth” is propagandized everywhere either without detailing the costs of capitalism or deliberately excusing those same costs — which are vast and counted in lives human and non-human. One thing we can definitely say about capitalism, without fear of contradiction by any except its most vociferous promoters, is that it creates mass inequality and therefore opportunity for exploitation (whilst destroying all before it). Such a system, even where it can be shown to create great wealth, would be unconscionable even for this reason alone.

The anarchist economy of the sixth item in my list above is the vision of something anti-capitalist and, indeed, destructive of capitalism and capitalist values and thinking (and so is an example of an anti-politics). It is based on the idea of “the commons” rather than wealth creation and it relies on shared practices and resources rather than the idea that people can own things, especially the products of the labour of others or anything at all exclusively for themselves in an entirely possessive way. This item from the list, like every item from the list, is about transvaluing our values, changing ourselves into people who are no longer capitalists, or people moulded and shaped to think like capitalists. My point is that if we take up these values, in all their anarchistic meaning and intent, we shall not only not be capitalists anymore but we shall be equipped to live like people who don’t need to exploit and dominate other people and things anymore in order to live our lives. Capitalism, in this sense, is seen as a set of values and a state of mind that we need to escape and as an ideology violently imposed and enforced upon us by the apparatus of the authoritarian capitalist state and the capitalist-generated imperatives

that only allow us capitalistic choices [such as have money or steal or starve]. Ideas such as needing money to purchase property called food in order to survive are all fictions ultimately enforced by violence that must be defeated by just such values and practices as I outline in my list.

Key to this list [although the list should be read as a set of values and practices which interact with each other in innumerable ways that always imply and entail each other] are the practices of commensality [eating together around an open table in a way which cultivates relationships and shares resources], mutual aid [mutual assistance and cooperation which builds relationships and destroys the idea of competition for resources] and the gift [literally giving things away without expectation of return or recompense]. It should be easy to see how such practices promote, and are based on, other values from my list. They fundamentally promote cooperation and human solidarity, for example, and are seen to implicate what Peter Kropotkin, in his book *Mutual Aid*, calls “the close dependency of everyone’s happiness upon the happiness of all”. What these practices are based on is an attitude of sharing with a refusal to calculate who has given what to whom and so who owes what to who. The opposite of this, it should easily be seen, is exactly what capitalism does rely on. Put simply, the capitalistic idea is the idea of property which can be exclusively owned and of everything having a price in a “game” which is all about acquisition. Inevitably, this leads to debt which puts people in a position of subservience. But this anarchist economics of commensality, mutual aid and the gift which I am opposing to this does not do that. Instead, in a cooperative, mutual way which encourages community and the forming of supportive relationships, it refuses the calculations of capitalism and the economics of exploitation. Anarchist economics is community-building and relationship-creating

rather than the impersonal capitalist marketplace. Practising these anarchist practices reveals the economics of anarchism to be about reshaping human relationships from ones of domination and exploitation to ones of solidarity and cooperation, conditions under which capitalism could not survive.

So to capitalism more explicitly, an economic relation promoted by the same people who promoted liberal democracy and the Nation State (or “politics” as I have often called it in this book). I probably do not need to say too much about capitalism because I am certain everyone reading this both feels its effects on a daily basis and has their own, perhaps even personal, horror stories about it. This fact alone should make us wonder how such a ubiquitously destructive system survives, although President Biden personally pronouncing that he is a “proud capitalist”, as he has during his presidency, should not surprise us. Anarchism, the values and practices of which is what this book is about when it talks about “guerrilla mind”), is, on the other hand, pretty much an anti-capitalist movement from its inception. Look, for example, how the British anarchist writer, Iain Mackay, describes it:

*“Anarchism is libertarian socialism, a decentralised, federal system based on worker and community control. Private property is replaced by possession, property rights by use rights. This means that the means of production are socially owned and anyone who joins a workplace or community automatically takes part in its management — no more bosses, no more governors. It is based on the ideas of association which were raised by those workers who first experienced wage-labour — the selling your labour and so liberty to a capitalist who then, in return for ordering you about, gets to keep the product of your labour.”*



Mackay, whose own anarchism is somewhat less “egoist” than mine, consequently suggests that this is why the first person to call themselves an anarchist as if anarchism were a badge of honour, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, wrote the first “anarchist book” as “first and foremost a critique of capitalism”. This book, of course, is *What is Property?* and the answer to the question posed by the title, at least in a capitalist theory of property from an anarchist perspective, is “theft”. (That is, capitalism advances, and only works at all, on the basis of stealing both things and from the labour of others.) Here, engaging briefly in some historical analysis, we must note that capitalism has far more in common with “liberalism” than anarchism does — even though the latter’s critics often try to argue that anarchism is, in fact, merely only liberalism taken to an extreme. The problem with this is that, as Mackay again explains in his essay “A Few Thoughts on Anarchism”, liberalism’s “major theorists, such as John Locke, were seeking to justify the social position of the bourgeoisie and its privileges and so were primarily interested in property and not liberty.” Capitalism thus comes to be the dominating ideology of an already dominant clique configured as the overlords of a hierarchy in the context of liberal politics.

Therefore, following Mackay again, “Locke’s theory of property is not a defence of labour’s right to its product but rather a defence of the appropriation of that product by the owning class.” It thus gives that labour a price [as it does everything else] and says that it can be bought and sold. Capitalism holds such values to this day. As to the State, “The state is formed when property owners join together into a civil society to better secure their rights and property, creating a political power above themselves which decrees the law and acts as a neutral umpire in disputes.” Mackay’s anarchist analysis of this is then that “Classical liberalism is not a theory of freedom, of finding social

associations that protect and nourish individuality, but rather attempts to justify hierarchies by giving them a veneer of consent.” As such, “It sees freedom as isolation, not a product of social interaction as anarchists do. It feigns to believe that freedom and equality are not interrelated and interdependent.” (Compare Landstreicher on this and see the second item in my list above.)

Capitalism is then chopping people up into individual units which can be bought and sold but with the disadvantage built in that if you don’t start off as part of a wealthy elite or a network of such relationships then the cards are stacked against you from the start, you are much more likely to be the exploited than the exploiter. Following this line of thinking, we come to nod sagely at Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s assertion that “Man was born free but is everywhere in chains” in *The Social Contract*. (This *Social Contract*, by the way, is, of course, also one of the key documents of liberal political orthodoxy, something which tries to manipulate and manufacture our consent as an act of political coercion – to which our anti-politics is consequently opposed.)

Property, the State and capitalism then go together (not least in Proudhon’s thinking which Mackay follows) as pillars supporting an edifice which is created to imprison the mass of people inside. The State defends property not least because the people who erect this edifice own most of it. Capitalism is itself a theory of exploitation of resources [which includes people further down the hierarchy] in order to extract profit for those who can be said to own things. That might be as the landlord of where you live or as the owner and/or boss of where you work or as the landowner of some tract of land. In each case, ownership is said to confer rights to exploit what is owned [which might include you]. As Proudhon writes, then, “The economic notion of capital, the political notion of

government or authority, the theological notion of the Church, these three notions are identical and completely interchangeable: an attack upon one is an attack upon the others.” What he is getting at here is that these ideas [which all have their own material presence] work on the basis of domination and so by exploiting those dominated. Their power, moreover, gives them the perfect base from which to coerce those they have power over. As Proudhon has it, “In order to oppress the people effectively, they must be clapped in irons in their bodies, their will and their reason.” Capitalism thus works by doing exactly that, coercing body, mind and will in a totalising activity which aims to lock you into a world of no alternative, not even being able to think of such a thing. Proudhon, in this context, defines anarchism as “the denial of Government and of Property” and so contradicts the very practices and apparatuses of capitalism in a demonstration of what I term “guerrilla mind”.

What I put here theoretically, with a little history of anarchism thrown in as spice, is of course known to each one of us by our daily experience. It is not just Peter Kropotkin in 1896 in his text *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal* who knows “full well... that it is futile to speak of liberty as long as economic slavery exists.” We all know it too from first hand experience. We know it from being workers in a gig economy where we earn pitiful wages whilst having onerous workloads. We know it from working in warehouses where you don’t even have time to take a piss. We know it from the refusal by governments to pass laws which allow the mass of workers to earn a living wage. We know it because we have “jobs” that guarantee us no actual work but which expect us to turn up on the dot if ever we are summoned. We know it because of a life of unfulfilling, under-rewarded drudgery in which we are either fully exploited or play our part in a game of seeing who can exploit someone else best.

But this, it should be noted, is only because capitalism is working as it should. The aim of capitalism is to take money and make more money from it. Profit is the difference between paying for the resources necessary to produce something [including workers] and the wealth produced because of it. It is, thus, entirely in phase with the capitalist ethic to reduce worker costs to the absolute minimum. Worker rights or even worker comforts [which are sure to cost money] are antithetical to the capitalist interest. Another way of saying all this, of course, is simply to say that capitalism is the philosophy and practice of exploitation. But lest we imagine [like some naive, over-optimistic fool] that capitalism's exploitative character is reformable, allow David Graeber, in his brief 2014 piece "Savage Capitalism is Back — And It Will Not Tame Itself", to correct your misapprehension when he states:

*"Capitalism does not contain an inherent tendency to civilise itself. Left to its own devices, it can be expected to create rates of return on investment so much higher than overall rates of economic growth that the only possible result will be to transfer more and more wealth into the hands of a hereditary elite of investors, to the comparative impoverishment of everybody else."*

Capitalism, then, is exploitation. And if you aren't doing the exploiting then you can be sure you're either being exploited or have been cast aside as economically unproductive and as, therefore, useless. As Steve Klabnik writes in his "Anti-Capitalism 101", "Money does not turn into more money by magic, but by the work we do every day." Capitalism thus needs somebody to do the work of creating profit for owners, somebody whom it can rip off and make benefit from their labour. The State, essentially the public muscle of capital in this ideology, and certainly so at our stage of the game, is there "to maintain

the capitalist system and aid the accumulation of capital. As such, the State uses repressive laws and violence against the working class when [they] try to further [their] interests against capital. For example, bringing in anti-strike laws, or sending in police or soldiers to break up strikes and demonstrations” as Klabnik puts it. The State is, thus, not the defender of the public, much less of any human individual. Its the bought and paid for tool of capitalism and the property it relies on. Anyone entering into its organs and institutions is immediately co-opted by capitalism, suddenly finding corporate sponsors and CEOs clamouring for their attention, interest and “sponsorship”. This, in turn, is why anarchists have always eschewed voting, parliaments and congresses, and any such “political” action itself, in favour of an anti-politics. Instead, they have preferred “direct action”, action under their own control that cannot be co-opted by capitalist interests because it eschews everyday economic and political relations by refusing “politics”.

In this respect, Steve Klabnik’s concise history with regard to capitalism from “Anti-Capitalism 101” is worth quoting in full to explain [briefly] how we got here:

*“Capitalism is presented as a ‘natural’ system, formed a bit like mountains or land masses by forces beyond human control, i.e. that it is an economic system ultimately resulting from human nature. However it was not established by ‘natural forces’ but by intense and massive violence across the globe. First, in the ‘advanced’ countries, enclosures drove self-sufficient peasants from communal land into the cities to work in factories. Any resistance was crushed. People who resisted the imposition of wage labour were subjected to vagabond laws and imprisonment, torture, deportation or execution. In England under the reign of Henry VIII alone 72,000 people were executed for vagabondage.*

*Later capitalism was spread by invasion and conquest by Western imperialist powers around the globe. Whole civilisations were brutally destroyed with communities driven from their land into waged work. The only countries that avoided conquest were those—like Japan—which adopted capitalism on their own in order to compete with the other imperial powers. Everywhere capitalism developed, peasants and early workers resisted, but were eventually overcome by mass terror and violence.*

*Capitalism did not arise by a set of natural laws which stem from human nature: it was spread by the organised violence of the elite. The concept of private property of land and means of production might seem now like the natural state of things, however we should remember it is a man-made concept enforced by conquest. Similarly, the existence of a class of people with nothing to sell but their labour power is not something which has always been the case—common land shared by all was seized by force, and the dispossessed forced to work for a wage under the threat of starvation or even execution. As capital expanded, it created a global working class consisting of the majority of the world's population whom it exploits but also depends on."*

Those thinking ahead, reading this history, should also be able to imagine that things can get worse for, should we escape the climate catastrophe capitalism has created in only about 250 years of industrially and technologically-funded capitalism, then what if the capitalist elite could create intelligent robots to do their work for them? [This, after all, is what they have always wanted anyway.] The future for what some call the "proletariat" is of their impending obsolescence after the end of their forced exploitation.

Such is what "politics" has brought us. But what of "anti-politics"? In 1870, Mikhail Bakunin wrote the following in his *Letters To A Frenchman On The Present Crisis* [said "crisis" being the Franco-Prussian War]:

*"There are men, many of them among the so-called revolutionary bourgeoisie, who, by mouthing revolutionary slogans, think that they are making the Revolution. Feeling that they have thus adequately fulfilled their revolutionary obligations, they now proceed to be careless in action and, in flagrant contradiction to principles, commit what are in effect wholly reactionary acts. We who are truly revolutionary must behave in an altogether different manner. Let us talk less about revolution and do a great deal more. Let others concern themselves with the theoretical development of the principles of the Social Revolution, while we content ourselves with spreading these principles everywhere, incarnating them into facts... All of us must now embark on stormy revolutionary seas, and from this very moment we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda."*

Bakunin here is essentially saying "actions speak louder than words". Voltairine de Cleyre, a woman Emma Goldman called "the greatest woman anarchist of America", would seemingly agree. Talking about "direct action", something she contrasts with "political action" - the latter being that action which defers to political channels - in her essay of the same name from 1912, the same year as her untimely death - she even regards it as absolutely necessary if you want to get anything done - as well as that thing which, in most circumstances, people already do anyway. She says:

*"Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist... Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action. Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts... These actions are generally not due to anyone's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practicers of it. However, most people are also indirect or political actionists. And they are both these things at the same time, without making much of an analysis of either. There are only a limited number of persons who eschew political action under any and all circumstances; but there is nobody, nobody at all, who has ever been so "impossible" as to eschew direct action altogether... Those who, by the essence of their belief, are committed to Direct Action only are - just who? Why, the non-resistants; precisely those who do not believe in violence at all! Now do not make the mistake of inferring that I say direct action means non-resistance; not by any means. Direct action may be the extreme of violence, or it may be as peaceful as the waters of the Brook of Siloa that go softly. What I say is, that the real non-resistants can believe in direct action only, never in political action. For the basis of all political action is coercion; even when the State does good things, it finally rests on a club, a gun, or a prison, for its power to carry them through. ... It is by and because of the direct acts of the forerunners of social change, whether they be of peaceful or warlike nature, that the Human Conscience, the conscience of the mass,*



*becomes aroused to the need for change. It would be very stupid to say that no good results are ever brought about by political action; sometimes good things do come about that way. But never until individual rebellion, followed by mass rebellion, has forced it. Direct action is always the clamorer, the initiator, through which the great sum of indifferentists become aware that oppression is getting intolerable."*

De Cleyre makes several points here about direct action. She points out that most people already possess the impulse to directly sort out their affairs. She adds that most people don't even really think about this when they do; they just do it. It is, she implies, entirely normal to do so, the naturally expected activity. She adds, in a time of industrial unrest due to the great oppression of long hours and small wages, that even those who silently protest and do not resist are actually people taking matters into their own hands in a direct way. In her final section, she makes the point that even though political processes may sometimes work for good (as even a broken watch is right twice a day), they never work for good unless some person or persons took direct actions to bring matters to a head to begin with. Even actions which don't produce the difference they intend to provoke, she insists, have the witnessing function of testimony and consciousness-raising in others. Direct action, then, in Voltairine de Cleyre's estimation, will always be necessary in order to secure freedoms not yet attained and to retain those that have been. "Politics" is not enough.

Max Stirner (who was not an anarchist) is known today as perhaps the major European proponent of what was once known as "egoist", and is now known as "individualist", anarchism. He did this unknowingly and it was not his purpose. The label itself is actually somewhat deceptive and indicates only that branch of anarchism which focuses on the

human individual as a being in their own right, as a person with their own agency and autonomy. It is, of course, the case that no one exists in a vacuum - and so that individualist concerns must be balanced by social ones [I myself say this as someone convinced of what I call a "social egoism", my term for my conception of anarchism] - but the focus of everything I have shared about anarchy and anarchism in this book would be missing a major plank of its thesis did I not focus on the vital part played in anarchism by the self-actualisation and, in some sense, the self-importance, the consciousness, of the individual. It is this that anarchists like Stirner were pre-eminently interested in. The following quotation is, then, in regard to the State from this self-actualising perspective:

*"The fight of the world today is, as it is said, directed against the 'established.' Yet people are wont to misunderstand this as if it were only that what is now established was to be exchanged for another, a better, established system. But war might rather be declared against establishment itself, the State, not a particular state, not any such thing as the mere condition of the State at the time; it is not another State (e.g., a 'people's State') that men aim at, but their union, uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing. - A State exists even without my co-operation: I am born in it, brought up in it, under obligations to it, and must 'do it homage.' It takes me up into its 'favour,' and I live by its 'grace.' Thus the independent establishment of the State founds my lack of independence; its condition as a 'natural growth,' its organism, demands that my nature not grow freely, but be cut to fit it. That it may be able to unfold in natural growth, it applies to me the shears of 'civilization'; it gives me an education and culture adapted to it, not to me, and teaches me, e.g., to respect the laws, to refrain from injury to State property (i.e., private property), to reverence divine and earthly highness, etc.; in short, it teaches me to be - unpunishable, 'sacrificing' my ownness to 'sacredness' (everything possible is sacred; e.g., property, others'*

*lives, etc.,). In this consists the sort of civilization and culture that the State is able to give me: it brings me up to be a 'Serviceable instrument,' a 'serviceable member of society.'*

*... The State always has the sole purpose to limit, tame, subordinate, the individual – to make him subject to some generality or other; it lasts only so long as the individual is not all in all, and it is only the clearly marked restriction of me, my limitation, my slavery. Never does a State aim to bring in the free activity of individuals, but always that which is bound to the purpose of the State. Through the State nothing in common comes to pass either, as little as one can call a piece of cloth the common work of all the individual parts of a machine; it is rather the work of the whole machine as a unit, machine work. In the same style everything is done by the State machine too; for it moves the clockwork of the individual minds, none of which follow their own impulse. The State seeks to hinder every free activity by its censorship, its supervision, its police, and holds this hindering to be its duty, because it is in truth a duty of self-preservation. The State wants to make something out of man, therefore there live in it only made men; every one who wants to be his own self is its opponent and is nothing. 'He is nothing' means as much as, the State does not make use of him, grants him no position, no office, no trade, etc.*

*... The best State will clearly be that which has the most loyal citizens, and the more the devoted mind for legality is lost, so much the more will the State, this system of morality, this moral life itself, be diminished in force and quality. With the 'good citizens' the good State too perishes and dissolves into anarchy and lawlessness.*

*'Respect for the law!' By this cement the totality of the State is held together. 'The law is sacred, and he who affronts it a criminal.' Without crime no State: the moral world - [which]*

*the State is - is crammed full of scamps, cheats, liars, thieves, etc. Since the State is the 'lordship of law,' its hierarchy, it follows that the egoist, in all cases where his advantage runs against the State's, can satisfy himself only by crime ..."*

Stirner here makes the argument that the State, any state, any fictive territory which has rules and boundaries and overseers, be they bankers, politicians, workers or even neighbours, is a standing threat to the self-actualising consciousness of the free individual. Such states, in fact, must by their very nature impinge on such freedom and demand allegiance to themselves. This not only indicates that, where states exist, the anarchist individual will constantly be under threat from them as allegiance is demanded or coerced but that its also the case that the anarchist individual's consciousness must be engaged in a continual process of actualisation against it. Just as with Bakunin actions speak louder than words and with de Cleyre "direct action" will always be necessary, so, too, with Stirner's egoism, the anarchist, the anti-politician, must also be taking steps to ground and activate their consciousness of themselves as free, uncoerced individuals. What Stirner's thesis shows is that anarchism begins from within and, wherever else it goes and whatever else it achieves, it can only ever begin from within. You are the anarchism and the anarchy is you.

Colin Ward was one of the most active and significant British anarchists of the second half of the twentieth century, not least as editor of British anarchist newspaper, *Freedom*, from 1947-1960 and as the founder and editor of the British monthly journal, *Anarchy*, from 1961-1970. He is perhaps best known to later generations of British anarchists, however, as the writer of the influential book, *Anarchy in Action* [first published in 1973], a book originally intended "for those who either had no idea of what

the word [anarchism] implied, or who knew exactly what it implied, and had rejected it, considering that it had no relevance for the modern world.” The original title for this book, on the other hand, Ward tells us, had been “Anarchism as a theory of organisation” and this was because, as Ward himself says in the introduction to the Second Edition, the book “is about the ways in which people organise themselves in any kind of human society, whether we care to categorise those societies as primitive, traditional, capitalist or communist.”

In this respect, the tenth chapter of *Anarchism in Action* [and the linking of anarchism with “action” in this title is a very pertinent one for me as, indeed, for Colin Ward] is relevant in discussing children at play as an “anarchist parable” - as Ward puts it. He writes, at the beginning of this chapter that:

*“All the problems of social life present a choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions, and the ultimate claim we can make for the libertarian approach is that it fulfils its function better. The adventure playground is an arresting example of this living anarchy; one that is valuable both in itself and as an experimental verification of a whole social approach.”*

Here Ward reminds us that the anarchist claim is not a partisan one - live like us because we want you too - but a functional and qualitative one: the anarchist claim is that the anarchist way will lead to better outcomes for everyone altogether. So anarchist action, and acting in anarchist ways, is not just one more silly “team this versus team that” spectacle but the very serious claim that there are better ways to live and to organise people in community and society - and that these are anarchist ways.

The specific example Ward wants to consider in his tenth chapter is children's adventure playgrounds. Considering one in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, he says:

*"When The Yard was opened in Minneapolis with the aim of giving the children 'their own spot of earth and plenty of tools and materials for digging, building and creating as they see fit', it was every child for himself. The initial stockpile of secondhand lumber disappeared like ice off a hot stove. Children helped themselves to all they could carry, sawed off long boards when short pieces would have done. Some hoarded tools and supplies in secret caches. Everybody wanted to build the biggest shack in the shortest time. The workmanship was shoddy.*

*Then came the bust. There wasn't a stick of lumber left. Hijacking raids were staged on half-finished shacks. Grumbling and bickering broke out. A few children packed up and left. But on the second day of the great depression most of the youngsters banded together spontaneously for a salvage drive. Tools and nails came out of hiding. For over a week the youngsters made do with what they had. Rugged individualists who had insisted on building alone invited others to join in - and bring their supplies along. New ideas popped up for joint projects. By the time a fresh supply of lumber arrived a community had been born."*

This image, idealistic as some might accuse it of being, also seems somewhat naive in a world of kids with mobile phones and games consoles who, through technology, have now often been sent from playgrounds into hiding in their bedrooms. But that naivety also only serves to come as a shock as the image posits old questions anew: what might people achieve together if left to their own devices? Does how we raise children determine who they will be and who [and how] they can become?

What is at stake here, and the divergent ideas informing different approaches to education, are outlined by Ward in a letter he quotes from the *Times Educational Supplement* which was sent in by someone working with children in adventure playgrounds and seeking to defend them from their more organisational and authoritarian critics:

*"By what criteria are adventure playgrounds to be judged? If it is by the disciplined activity of the uniformed organisations, then there is no doubt but we are a failure. If it is by the success of our football and table tennis teams then there is no doubt we are a flop. If it is by the enterprise and endurance called for by some of the national youth awards then we must be ashamed.*

*But these are the standards set by the club movement, in one form or another, for a particular type of child. They do not attract the so-called 'unclubbable', and worse – so we read regularly - nor do they hold those children at whom they are aimed. May I suggest that we need to examine afresh the pattern taken by the young at play and then compare it with the needs of the growing child and the adolescent? We accept that it is natural for boys and girls below a certain age to play together, and think it equally natural for them to play at being grown up. We accept, in fact, their right to imitate the world around them. Yet as soon as a child is old enough to see through the pretence and demand the reality, we separate him from his sister and try to fob him off with games and activities which seem only to put off the day when he will enter the world proper. The adventure playgrounds in this country, new though they are, are already providing a number of lessons which we would do well to study...*

*For three successive summers the children have built their dens and created Shanty Town, with its own hospitals, fire station, shops, etc. As each den appeared, it became functional and brought with it an appreciation of its nature and responsibility... The pattern of adventure playgrounds is set by the needs of the children who use them; their 'toys' include woodwork benches and sewing machines. We do not believe that children can be locked up in neat little parcels labelled by age and sex. Neither do we believe that education is the prerogative of the schools."*

As Colin Ward sees this "The adventure playground is a kind of parable of anarchy, a free society in miniature, with the same tensions and ever-changing harmonies, the same diversity and spontaneity, the same unforced growth of co-operation and release of individual qualities and communal sense, which lie dormant in a society whose dominant values are competition and acquisitiveness." He continues:

*"But having discovered something like the ideal conditions for children's play - the self-selected evolution from demolition through discovery to creativity - why should we stop there? Do we really accept the paradox of a free and self-developing childhood followed by a lifetime of dreary and unfulfilling toil? Isn't there a place for the adventure playground or its equivalent in the adult world?"*

*Of course there is, and just as the most striking thing for the visitor, or the organiser, in an adventure playground is not the improvised gymnastics, but the making and building that goes on all around, so the significant thing about adult recreation is not so much the fishing, sailing, pigeon-fancying or photography aspect (though in their organisation these frequently illustrate the principles of self-regulation and free federation that are*



*emphasised in this book), still less is it the commercial and professional sport which is just another aspect of the entertainment industry. The significant aspect is the way in which the urge to make things, and to construct and reconstruct, to repair and remodel, denied outlet in the ordinary sterile world of employment, emerges in the explosion of 'do-it-yourself' activities of every kind.*

*This in turn leads to a spontaneous sharing of equipment and skills:*

*'I've got two very good friends,' Mrs Jarvis said, 'Mrs Barker, who lives opposite, has got a spin drier and I've got a sewing machine. I put my washing in her spin drier and she uses my sewing machine when she wants to. Then the lady next door on one side is another friend of mine. We always help each other out.' Mr Dover's great hobby is woodwork; at the time he was interviewed he was busy on a pelmet he was making for a friend living next door and he had just finished a toy train for the son of another. He relies on Fred, another friend who is also a neighbour, to help when needed. 'Just today I was sawing a log for the engine of this train and Fred sees that my saw is blunt and lends me a sharp one. Anything at all I want he'll lend it to me if he has it. I'm the same with him. The other day he knocked when I wasn't here and borrowed my steps - we take each other for granted that way.'*

What is the point of this parable of children's play then applied to a world of adults? It is surely that we don't have to teach children there must be a leader, that they must do things a certain way and that they must do as they are told. We do not have to teach hierarchy and coercion and rigid regimentation as if human beings were soldiers best organised like cogs in a machine or citizens subject to political overlords. The ethic of Colin Ward's example is that people can, and should, be trusted, in their individuality, to

form natural bonds of cooperation enabling them to work together for mutual benefit. This is, in fact, the anarchist way Colin Ward's book recommends not simply as the anarchist way but, ultimately, as the better and more functional way for all (much, in fact, as Peter Kropotkin did in his book *Mutual Aid* seven decades before him).

We come to the point of these four previous examples and its a simple one - even if one people struggle to accept or become enthusiastic about. This point is the reason we are motivated to "anti-politics" rather than "politics". This is that: OUR LIVES ARE UP TO US! (and that them being "up to us", in acts of direct action beyond, or outside, the settled and forced routes of political institution, is what "anti-politics" actually amounts to). It is to accept the wisdom in Emma Goldman's statement that "People have only as much liberty as they have the intelligence to want and the courage to take" and to additionally accept that a better way of living, a more equitable way of living, an emancipated way of living, is not EVER going to be handed to us on a plate by "politics". Feeding the hungry, housing the houseless, aiding those who need some help, building alternatives to today's institutions and possibilities, educating people into a new, common humanity of wide diversity, shifting built-in power imbalances, is for those who will build another future based on reconfigured human relations borne of different values and ethics. It is not for those, or for the systems of relationships, that wish to maintain them. Guerrillas actualise their freedom by fighting the established power for the sake of lives they choose. Pirates lived their free lives by deserting state navies and taking up lives in opposition to them. Anarchists declare governments illegitimate even as ideas.

People from Bakunin to de Cleyre to Stirner to Ward in fact knew full well that it is in taking the initiative, in not waiting to be asked, in self-actualising and taking

responsibility for our political consciousness, that anarchism (or, in Stirner's case, a self-regarding egoism) becomes more likely and more possible as the organising ethos of our world. So, there is no start point we are waiting for; for the starting point was when we were born, in blood and pain emerging from our mothers' wombs. From that point on it has been a matter of how we will live and how we will die and, both individually and together, it is a puzzle for us to solve and a puzzle only we can solve. IT IS UP TO US AND OUR ANTI-POLITICS even as it was up to guerrillas, pirates and anarchists before us. There is no future in leaving it to others but a future (and a present) others decide for us. This basic point must be understood.

This perhaps comes to regular readers as something of a revelation – and it should since we have spent all our lives being told that “politics” was our means to safe and stable lives. Of course, we were told nothing of the cost of this (or that we might well be part of that cost) and we were not offered any alternatives. But now that we see that politics (and its current economic basis, capitalism,) instantiates the prison envisioned in my articles of Jolly Roger's anarchy, we might as well lean into the alternatives and to the anti-politics that I consequently prescribe and diagnose in the human past. Thus, the problem, as I conceive of it, is not the politics people have, the political systems they are entangled in, or even the crummy politicians they elect - and, let me be clear, those things are all very, very bad. People choose between nationalism or fascism, with capitalism never off the table, using political systems that are increasingly and openly rigged in order to elect monstrous clowns who are the absolute worst of us. But the issue, for me at least, is that, by the time you get to the politics and all the rest, you've already missed the point. All these things are consequent upon, and subsequent to, the thing I would focus on, the most vital thing in the world, in fact, which is THE WAY

PEOPLE THINK. The capitalists cottoned on to this long ago when the first modern mass media – newspapers – were invented. Newspapers were invented, naturally enough, by people who were already rich who figured out that if you could be the conduit for people's information then you could begin to control the people at large. The modern versions of such people today, figures like Rupert Murdoch, are courted by presidents and prime ministers exactly because they can influence how people think. In fact, numerous billionaires own newspapers, TV channels, film companies, magazines or social media services for exactly this reason. They get to decide what you are told and so control the discussion about what people will think.

I personally would say that's more important than capitalism or authoritarian government or the increasingly aggressive policing of the population in numerous countries around the world or even something like poverty because all those things only exist because they are put, in some way, within the bounds of public acceptability by our everyday thinking. Capitalism, for example, doesn't simply exist because it oppresses, exploits and crushes people. It also exists because there is something in it that attracts people. It's the shiny thing that ends up being bad for you but if it wasn't shiny – or seen as shiny – then no one would want it. If capitalism had absolutely no imagined upside - if it was unremittingly and obviously terrible to absolutely everybody – then it would never have stood a chance of making its way into the heart of our communal existence in the first place. It's like drugs. Lots of people will tell you they are bad and, in many cases, drugs can do bad things to you if taken to excess. But if that's all drugs were then no one would ever take them to begin with. Yet – obviously – they do because “drugs are terrible and dangerous” is not the whole story. They can also make you high.

So if there was one thing I could say to people right now it would be to pay attention to what, how and why you think – and so to the necessity of a guerrilla mind possessed of the importance of an anti-politics. This is born in on me every time I look at social media where the vast majority of people are being led by the nose by trends or news reports or things influencers or “celebrities” have said or done and things of this nature. In each case, someone’s money is directing their thinking, someone whose interests are almost certainly not theirs and neither are they the public’s. Here its not even the case that the ultimate money men behind whatever is being thrust in front of you for your consumption necessarily care if you end up agreeing with them or not. The point is that they got you to think about and discuss something *in terms they set for you*. Its not just about getting everyone to believe the same dumb thing. Its also about setting the terms of the debate, deciding what is and isn’t acceptable, making thoughts that they don’t want you to have impossible to hold in public, creating and instantiating values. In fact, this is probably the most dangerous and pernicious thing such media do. For example, we are in a quickly escalating situation of climate breakdown which is causing fires and extreme weather events of increasing alarm yet still, not least in board rooms and government offices and newsrooms, this is a matter of debate or flat out denial. Why? Because there are rich people spending money to control and direct that debate – as with so many others. Such people don’t want you to make your own mind up or have access to multiple sides of an argument: they want to make up your mind for you. They want you habituated to their outlets as a source of information so they can set the terms of debate in your head.

So point one for me, the source of everything, the wellspring of your whole life, is what and how you think and, most importantly, that you do it for yourself. That you set your

own agenda as the first and most important step in any anti-politics. Far, far too many people are just drones grazing information provided to them by people who are actually only interested in controlling them. And so the drones become clones too. This is true of people on the left just as much as the right. I see “socialists” and “anarchists” and “communists” doing exactly the same thing as the centrists and conservatives who are usually the ones setting the agendas as well. We have to break this notion that a newspaper or a TV channel or a social media company are setting the agenda for what is important, for how people live, for what matters. In many ways the idea of “The Matrix” is, and remains, the most pertinent one here because it very much is a matter of “unplugging” ourselves from this system of disinformation and control we have been plugged into. It all starts in our minds by delineating the parameters of our lives and if you control that then you have people in your pocket – you control how they will think and what they can and can’t value. Authoritarian capitalism controls us with police and laws, yes, but it controlled us with newspapers, TV and social media long before we ever saw our first cop. And the best thing about that (from coercive perspective) is that quite a lot of these people being controlled this way don’t even recognise that they are being controlled. Exactly like “The Matrix”.

What “the media” do, then, is like what happens in *The Matrix* in that people are fed a lie in order to keep them docile, controllable, exploitable. But its not just at the level of narratives or metanarratives, telling us stories about the world and how it should be run [there should be leaders, there should be private property, there should be capital and profit, etc.,] or that sort of thing – although that’s vitally important to the control aspect of it. More fundamentally, its about our values, its about meaning, its about these things which affect us unconsciously and that we rarely, if ever, think to question. Many of us

never even realise it but we've all been programmed with values and meanings from birth, perhaps even from before birth, from when our biological forms could begin to experience sensation or perceive in general. We are biological information gathering and interpretation organisms. That's how we survive: we have senses which gather information and turn it into something meaningful, something of and with value, so that we can develop habits which enable us to survive. Now if you could have a monopoly on that, if you could start to control it, habituate it to certain things, set the terms in which that system worked, how much power over people would that give you? That's the basic idea behind the matrix in the film of the same name. Feed people a lie, determine their thinking, set their values and hey presto: a slumbering source of power for yourself. Our societies today essentially work on the same basis and if we object "But we are free! We can do what we want!" Well, don't you think all those people in *The Matrix* did too?

We might then ask where the anti-politics that is anarchism fits into this and, at least partially, it is as a wake up call. (The first *Matrix* film famously ends with the song "Wake Up" by the anarchist band Rage Against the Machine.) Its Neo being told to "follow the white rabbit" to keep the metaphor of *The Matrix* going. But it is itself also prey to a moment of conservatism or becoming fossilised or canonised into particular forms. Yet if anarchism is truly "no leaders" then surely its people thinking for themselves and doing whatever the fuck they want instead? A leaderless place is not a place that just all agrees to do one thing thereafter; I mean, it might be in some wide-eyed anarchist's fantasy but its not bound to be. And its not bound to be because anarchism is not, or should not, be about binding anything. This is why I'm extremely dubious about anarchist fantasies of future confederations of local communities and even more dubious about institutional ideas such as those touted by Bookchin and his disciples which issue in fantasies of

political territories. These are both ideas of a “like now, only different” type of thinking; to be honest, they seem to me like mere reformism. But what if I don’t want things to be “like now” or, more to the point, I don’t see why they have to be? What if I imagine guerrillas and pirates are better models for me to follow? The most startling anarchist visionaries I can think of are not the Proudhons, Bakunins, Kropotkins, Malatestas or Bookchins, etc. It is not even someone like Emma Goldman - who I respect the hell out of and who attracts me like a moth to a flame.

Instead, its the ancient Chinese Daoists in the *Zhuangzi*; its Diogenes and his fellow Cynics; its Jesus of Nazareth, whether a fictional character or not, living a life of deliberate poverty and, seemingly, saying “Fuck your system of wealth and privilege! We will live our own way, a way that rejects every value you have because we have made our own, and we will not just survive, we will thrive!” That is new thinking. That is how you cut through the constant bullshit. That is “anti-politics”. You take charge of your own life and values. You create new meaning. You instantiate new forms of social existence outside “the rules” or the boundaries or the institutions and you leave them to grow organically. Compared to this, every “anarchist” idea a “traditional anarchist” has ever had is just reorganising the deck chairs on the Titanic depending on which view you would most like to have. But if we want to revolutionise our thinking and be an insurrection against all forms of “political”, homogenising, controlling thought then we must not let even other anarchists set boundaries around us and we must take slogans like “No gods, no masters” entirely to heart and follow them through to the end.

Here, however, we must consider the connotations and context of “anti-politics” (which, on the one hand, is clearly politics by other means and, on the other, is not politics as



authoritarian others would have us carry it out at all) and, in this sense, I have stopped using words like “revolution”. “Revolution”, when thought about along a politics-anti-politics axis, seems to become a word that’s a bit cheap and worthless. It is, for example, only ever used to mean one thing – a political revolution – and, as many thinking people have had the guts to realise, such revolutions never really quite happen as they were first imagined or, ultimately, don’t turn out the way they were planned. Often, where they succeed in toppling the power taken on, they end up instantiating an even worse regime that’s about even more control of others. So people are left touting a thing that’s an empty, pointless, even dangerous, thing to want – and especially in anarchist terms. I don’t here mean to trivialise people’s hopes for what they think of as a political kind of freedom but I do think that the real issues are much more important than this. I also think its important that anarchists think differently – as I’ve already been saying as well - rather than just in the same ways, if with a bit of reorganisation to make it look “anarchist”. No “revolution” is automatically good just for being a revolution and perpetual insurrection against ALL forms of political, economic or moral power have more anti-political and anarchist credentials than this.

I mean, think about the examples I preferred a couple of paragraphs ago (Daoists, Cynics, Jesus – an anarchist example would be Renzo Novatore). Were any of these people “revolutionaries” in the modern, political sense? No, they weren’t. They weren’t people who went out looking for that kind of fight – they didn’t want to “take control”, they were “anti-political”. Others of their time and place did. But not them; they knew it was pointless. These people were, if I can put it like this, more “philosophical” people who took a more rounded view of things. They were those who, like the individualist anarchist Émile Armand, weren’t prepared to wait for everyone to catch up with where

they were in their heads. *If freedom is meant to wait until people are ready for it then no one will ever be free.* What Armand then saw, as with my earlier examples, is that freedom (described in such things as having one's own agency and autonomy and a desire for a decentralised ability to engage in voluntary association) is a habit – and you have to start living that habit in whatever way you can right in this very moment otherwise that flame will get stubbed out again due to disillusionment, disappointment, frustration, etc. This freedom is then more of an insurrection than a revolution and in my thinking here I'm trying to put some clear blue water between those words. An insurrection is an eruption of something in the midst of whatever is around it (all forms of dominating, coercive power). An insurrection does not care if anyone joins it or follows it or not because it is an example of an anti-political existence that must become in that moment and that must deny the values of the dominant political system as a consequence of its own existence. An insurrection is the scream of existence in opposition to the prevailing conditions of existence. Its not just a wish for new background conditions of existence – its a making of your own conditions and a refusal to settle for anything less. And that, to me at least, makes anarchist insurrection much more authentic as anti-politics than anarchist revolution in most cases. Many "revolutions" are merely just more politics. And that we don't need.

Thus, we should consider this anarchist anti-politics both politically and existentially. We need to realise that a more conventionally political anarchism running along a Proudhon – Bakunin – Kropotkin type track is not the be all and end all. Figures like this lit a fire in a particular historical moment, a torch others then carried as well, in fact, and they had some good ideas and expressed some useful sentiments, but they are not the guardians of the anarchist flame or the keepers of the anarchist keys or anything like that. We do

not have to measure our desire for anarchist insurrection against any rules or regulations they, or anyone else, have stipulated. This is why people like Stirner, Nietzsche, Goldman, Novatore and Armand will always be important too for, besides their recognitions of necessary social interactions, they realise that personal existence, personal existence as who you uniquely are, is hardly an unimportant thing either. They see that providing for safe and secure social relations and social organisation is pointless if individual freedom and expression, to be the person that I am, is not also achieved in the process. So political anarchism – of all kinds – plays its part in informing this but its not everything and its certainly not a boundary to stay within. There is the politics of it, yes, but there is also the personal of it - and neither are negotiable. This, I surmise, results in an anti-politics as a constant and ever-present resistance to control.

But there is also still more than this to consider as well. Anarchism, as I have, I think, always said as long as I have attached myself to the word, is more than something certain human beings have historically wanted. It is, as Alan Moore once put it in an interview with Margaret Killjoy, “the state of affairs that usually pertains” and “the only political position that is actually possible” when he describes the world in general as “a basic state of anarchy” from which all other political positions and power bases then come. Moore’s point of view here is useful for more than one reason as well. First, it tells us that anarchy doesn’t look like what most people writing books about it think it does. It is not, for example, merely a deliberate political creation of given people. It in fact looks much more like what we see every day than some political anarchist’s, or some fiction writer’s, Utopia. It is a messy place full of lots of people doing very different things not lots of people all doing the same thing because they all now magically agree, having become convinced by “anarchism”. But the second thing Moore’s point is useful

for is busting the artificial boundaries of those types of people. Anarchy is Moore's "Land of Do As You Please" from the third book of *V for Vendetta* much more than its Bookchin's municipal institutionalism as found in many of his sterile tomes. So its an existential conception and not just a political one but its also something about the world or existence in general too. Its something to do with how the world is itself and with thinking itself, thinking for yourself, and not just more artificial, but this time "anarchist", things to contain people within. As I keep saying: anarchism is anarchy and it must be followed through to the end. That is what an insurrection is: following anarchy through to the end and refusing to let other people's boundaries of possibility be your boundaries of possibility. Anarchy is everything as it already is AND LEFT TO ITSELF just as the Daoists already conceived of it 2500 years ago. ("Doing nothing, nothing is left undone".) So it doesn't need to be controlled, contained or domesticated. It just needs to be enjoyed whilst staying in balance with it.

Of course, we need to now ask how all this might work and there are no miracles to be had here for it works like anything else does: by catching on, by people seeing the authenticity and necessity in it. A lot of people today are already defeated and controlled in their minds because they are a captive of the constant propaganda we are fed which I discussed earlier. They are not people who educate or actualise themselves and they have basically been trained to be adult children always dependent on someone else, always expecting someone else to do what is necessary to be done. (This, I suggest is one desire of "politics". Politics creates structural dependence which is why even people like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau spoke against it.) They are people of few or no values to whom it has never even occurred to articulate such things. Anarchism as an anti-politics is, or should be, the opposite of that. Its about taking

charge, about saying you will be the one who decides what happens to you and being unwilling to let anybody else wrest that responsibility away from you. (Emerson called this “self-reliance”.) Insurrection is this attitude expressed and taken forward into how you live your daily life and create relationships with others. Its not a matter of special rules or methods – although there are things you can do that others of similar mind have done before that help you express your insurrection in our current moment – but of an absolute authenticity of living which other people you might come into contact with in the course of life can’t help noticing. You know, for example, when you see a person who is driven or someone who is honest or conscientious. You notice it in their manner and their attitude. This, I think, is very much like that.

As to how others join it, its very much a matter of simple human relationships. There’s no club, no membership card, no place to go to sign up. Its about forming relationships with people - through things like genuine mutual aid - which are not like other hierarchical relationships. These are things that are based around different values and virtues and an ethical principle in opposition to capitalism, to authoritarianism, to exploitation, coercion and dominating or domesticating behaviour. Its about people who will stand up for that and about people who will stand up with them in doing that too. I can’t promise anyone here that this will grow into a mega movement that changes the world. Its not setting out to do that (just like pirates weren’t despite what Gabriel Kuhn thinks). It really starts and finishes in a place of authenticity and says “Who is with me?” and, as I’ve said in previously, follows that through to the end. Who knows where it takes you? All you can really do is point out the faults with the present way of organising things, and the pain and suffering it causes, and do your bit in helping people through it - both materially and by pointing out to as many people as you can why this is happening.

All this can be seen, from one angle, as a kind of activism, much the way guerrilla action could be, or as something more based in a choice about how one lives and organises oneself with others. It's certainly more than complaining about things on Twitter (which is now a dumpster of hate) all day but never doing a single fucking thing to even make your complaint in public amongst flesh and blood people. So, yes, it is imagined this results in action of whatever kind you deem appropriate, whether community action or support of some kind such as mutual aid projects, helping with homeless encampments or arranging community based services to serve some identified need, education, subversion actions against targets of various kinds, protest actions, building communes or communities,, squatting, finding ways to engage in moneyless societies or exchange - really whatever you feel is necessary. The ideas (and the needs to be met) are endless. It really is about just digging in and getting on with it if you are serious about it (no true guerrilla, pirate or anarchist was not serious about their chosen way of life and no one with an actual guerrilla mind feels no effects of that in their life and behaviour thereafter). A changed mind of the kind that I've been talking about that is now possessed of insurrectionary thinking will – must – lead to different values and a new approach to your whole life, including a new set of priorities and new habits of life.

When it comes to this “changed mind” – which is the “guerrilla mind” my title refers to – we might talk about two things. The first is capitalism (which I briefly discussed earlier) – and lots of people can find problems with that because they are overwhelmingly easy to show since most of us suffer from them – and the second is civilization – which people seem to want to resist discussing or criticising because they seemingly equate losing that with going back to living in caves and scratching in the dirt. Now, in response, first of all I'd say there are hundreds of millions of people (maybe even a few billion) alive right

now who already “live in caves”, or their close equivalents such as ramshackle shacks or flimsy hovels, and who probably don’t have any other option. So if you think of that as a step down then you’ve been living an incredibly privileged life already by the standards of many who don’t live connected to a running water system or power lines, etc. So that’s one thing.

Another thing is, though, and I always say this to people who hesitate when I say we need to “get past” civilization, is that you have to count the cost of your civilization because that is part of the price of its existence. You have to ask what civilization costs and if its sustainable. Current estimates would seem to suggest the price of civilization – which now has included this exploitative ideology called capitalism for about 400 years – is too much for the planet to pay. I am personally amenable to those anarchists (and some others) who have argued that civilization is essentially domestication of the planet and its classification as “resources”. I don’t think this is a good step in the long run and I think the thinking that says we “possess” the planet and that its ours to domesticate and that everything on it [often including other people] is “resources” is a destructive fiction. I also don’t then see much difference between capitalism and civilization itself except to say that the first is a more intensive relative or instrument of the second. Both exploit. Both want to possess. Both are unhealthily acquisitive. Both implicate, practically if not ideologically, the idea of authority which is exactly what the anarchist is meant to be against. If anarchists want to dissolve authoritarian power through anti-politics then, as far as I can tell, capitalism and civilization are both implicated in that and a post-capitalist, post-civilizational world would look very, very different to now, not least in terms of organisation, which will then necessarily have effects all the way down the line.

Now I have to say that I don't actually expect human beings to bring those changes about. I am a realist/pessimist and I want to be up front about that. I think the challenge is frankly beyond most people who will not "wake up" as it were – especially when it comes to corrupt elected leaders and CEOs who are either greedy pigs with their noses in the trough or the puppets of such people and a media landscape controlled by unethical monsters. But I'm almost certain that they will do it coincidentally, probably as a result of climate breakdown and the structural collapse it causes in and because of authoritarian capitalism – because I think we can plainly see them all doing it now as everything is burned, poisoned, exploited and destroyed around us. So this will not be a pretty or a painless event but, assuming there are any human beings left as a result of it, those who are insurrectionary anarchists and practitioners of anti-politics of the type I describe who can survive it will need to be active in their communities modelling, educating and pushing for post-capitalist, post-civilizational lives of the type I describe in this book as and when this occurs. But there's no time like the present and I think we should absolutely be about doing that already – because the breakdown is occurring right now.

Yet how is this anti-politics informed so that we know what to do and that it will work? Is it in line with standard narratives of anarchism (whatever we might imagine them to be)? I do think it is informed by a historical understanding of anarchism and more than anarchism – by which I mean an extended narrative of anarchism, one that includes people who staged insurrections against their own civilizations too such as those I've already named or my examples at the start of this book (guerrillas and pirates, those who fight for their lives and a way of life). It is being informed by an ethical sensibility too (values, virtues), one I would identify with this tradition and with characters who



would come up in a retelling of it. (I have told personal versions of this story in my books *Black Void*, *Black Flag* and *Black Dog*.) So it is personal and existential, yes, but it is also social and about systems and organisation. If you are the kind of anarchist who thinks Bakunin or Kropotkin were right then I don't think you'd have much problem understanding that any less than if you are a person who agrees most strongly with Stirner's egoism or Goldman's egoist-communist hybrid of anarchism. Such an anti-political insurrection as I'm talking about implicates the thinking of all of these people but also of the Daoists, the Cynics, Jesus of Nazareth, the English Diggers who only wanted to make their own lives on common land without interference, or modern climate protestors who say we need to reorganise democracy for the sake of a more just and habitable planet as well.

In principle, then, I'd include many people in such a sensibility, even including people some of the other people might argue with (like Black Lives Matter or trans people), but with a "live and let live" mentality which says "you do your own thing, and I will do mine". I can conceive of people joining together for mutually beneficial reasons (for some things would just help us all out, regardless of our differences) without having to be cheek by jowl with each other all the time or in each others' pockets. (Anarchist ideas of federation of communities, such as discussed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, or more ancient ideas of community matriarchies, as discussed by anthropologists, make such ideas live possibilities.) So this combines a self-directed, individual life with the necessity of social action and cohesion. I think that's how most anarchists understand anarchism, as a kind of what I term "social egoism". Of course, to answer another part of this question, I can't say where this would go. I can only say that it has to be in the present when people must express themselves and protest the values and practices that

imprison them – and then live lives of insurrection against them. Anti-politics seeks no Utopia but only to live as it will in the present, its simple aim being only to live a self-organising life as it was originally gifted by a nihilistic universe.

But what then is to be done about things against which anti-politics protests, things as big as capitalism and civilization? This is a good question – but its possibly based on a false premise. First, I want to point out that both of these things crept upon human beings over time. They weren't just sprung on people one day by some kind of Bond villain unleashing their master plan. They were both habits human beings got into - and over centuries, even millennia. They were insidious and more especially a matter of values and ideas which became practices than anything else. Their insidious nature is important but that also reminds us that they didn't happen in a vacuum. For all that time there was an idea – leadership or authority – and yet another, a derivate of the first – the idea of property and possession – that was also involved too. These ideas, that you can have a boss whose orders you should follow [perhaps encouraged by physical or material penalties for disobedience or non-compliance – something like imprisonment, torture or death, for example] and that someone can own something – making its use their exclusive right [again, with physical penalties for disobedience of such understandings] – were necessary to these new social and organisational understandings – which is what capitalism and civilization really are. The first concentrates relationships around exchanges based on wealth (profit) creation whilst the second concentrates human beings in civic urban communities but where these communities now drag in “resources” from all over as the people in these new, urban environments require more and more to live and life becomes more complex and acquisitive.

My point in saying all this is that you don't just stop such things by someone standing up and saying, "This is terrible. We need to stop." Even people called anarchists have been doing that for getting on for 200 years now to no physical effect. The Cynics and the Daoists were doing it nearer 2500 years ago in civilizations many of our fellow human beings would call primitive today. We're dealing with things here that are very addicting and habitual and that, whilst being ultimately and insidiously destructive in the end, bribe those they entangle in their webs with constructed wealth and value that people, who have grown up with the values of these things implanted within them from birth, find hard to break free from. Which, from the point of view of capitalism or civilization, is of course the point. These are dominating, totalizing, all-exploiting systems. They demand to control everything. This is why both have been based on authority, political power and, ultimately, police, law, courts, prisons and the use of violence on dissenters. These ideologies, through those they infected, learned to protect themselves and insulate themselves against those who would go another way. And that is what post-capitalist and post-civilizationalist anti-political anarchists like us have to face up to.

But you want to know how we stop them. Well, I don't necessarily think we do as I've already hinted. In fact, I think both capitalism and civilization are so destructive and so completely out of balance with the planet we live on that, in the end, they both stop themselves because they are ultimately unsustainable. The problem there, of course, is that they destroy a lot of things and kill a lot of people in the process. Anarchism, and other related ideas like socialism, communism and even ecology movements, are, I think, various socially-constructed self-defence mechanisms against this that identify key problems and suggest we need to reorganise ourselves and stop this. They are, if you like, examples of people who see the iceberg and think it might be a good idea if we

don't just ram into it, oblivious to even its existence. But, of course, people don't listen. They think they know better. They say the iceberg is an illusion. They say this ship is an ice breaker so it will cut through the ice. They think of the things they control or have power over that they want to keep. Any excuse not to have to change their lives or the values by which they make sense. But the iceberg is there and the ship is going to hit it and many people will drown as a result. Buckle up, Buttercup.

The insurrectionist practitioner of anti-politics is one who warns of this iceberg and is one who suggests alternative means of human organisation (all based in self-organisation) such that icebergs like this don't ever appear again and so can be avoided. The insurrectionist, if only for authenticity's sake, acts upon their own advice to show others that they are serious. The insurrectionist knows that what entire civilizations are living and so embody cannot be stopped by even a few hundreds of thousands of people who say it is wrong and point out its [rather obvious] dangers. Capitalism and especially civilization are remarkably resilient (yet not inevitable) ideas, not least because they come bearing bribes and wielding clubs and guns if the bribes aren't enough. They are coerced beliefs. They do not fight fair and they will kill to defend themselves in the form of their most zealous or unthinking adherents. A few people running around in open rebellion to them aren't going to worry them unnecessarily – especially if they are as unorganised and incoherent as they often are. How do we stop them? We probably don't. We watch as they collapse from within - and maybe help that process along in as non-lethal a way as possible [as far as human beings and other life is concerned] with tactical actions aimed to compromise their coercive and imprisoning forces. The only point in being free is to free somebody else. And to live free with them.

How we think about anarchy, as an example of anti-politics, is important in this context, Alan Moore's suggestion that anarchy is simply "the background to everything" or classical anarchist conceptions of some form of political anarchist social compact or settlement being possibilities here. My fundamental point for anti-politics in this case would be that anarchy is just a human description of a situation. It is a context. Can bad things happen in that context? Yes, of course, from our point of view. But there is no "anarchy's point of view". Anarchy isn't a substitute for God. It doesn't arbitrate good outcomes and bad outcomes. It doesn't, as some people have thought, have its own moral imperatives. In fact, it doesn't coerce outcomes at all. That is why it is anarchy. It is a leaderless place and context in which everything we are and know of just happens to exist. We can then act within it for good or ill, according to our various perspectives, but we can't blame anarchy for any of that. We can only blame ourselves. This, in fact, as far as I'm concerned, is why anarchism is what I say it is: an ethical stance based on values and virtues or an anti-politics, a self-organised life in the present, even a "politics of being present" as Dr Katherine Brown of Birmingham University wonderfully described it back to me in conversation. This is an understanding of anarchy and anarchism as matters of human responsibility. You might call anarchism understood this way basic common sense for it is only really saying that we shouldn't exploit everything and concentrate on controlling things for our own benefit to the detriment of everybody else. Chinese Daoists spoke of living life quietly and simply and not getting involved in wars of conquest which lead to conflict. Diogenes argued that the civilization of human beings led to them losing their connection to the rest of the natural world and its natural contingency. These were warnings of the same type and they articulated values like simplicity and quietude and living in a responsible present that many people, who live as accountants, would just laugh at today. But that doesn't make them wrong.

So I would hotly dispute the assertion that, if this is already anarchy, then it is that itself which is wrong and in need of some benevolent domestication (i.e. politics). Rather, I'd dispute the idea that anarchy is what some revered theorist of anarchism has thought it was or what some novelist has imagined it to be. Anarchy is messy, its a place without leaders and, of course, bad things can happen there. [Which is not to say bad things only happen without leaders, of course. Plenty of very bad things happen with leaders too, often caused by the leaders themselves.] But if you stop and really get serious thinking about anarchy and, as I always say, try to think it through to the end, then its hard to imagine it as this worldwide peace treaty where either some great mental and ideological reset has taken place which removes a lot of destructive habits and beliefs from human thinking or a great realisation has come over everybody such that they simply stop being the people they were before. People evolve, yes, but that takes time even if we know that startling events can produce behavioural change. Often, in fact, this change itself reverts back again over time as memories fade and the reasons for the change are forgotten. (There are so many "revolutions" that turn out not to be.) With the unfolding climate breakdown now, for example, there are those who will never change their behaviour and others who, should we somehow change course in regard to causing more and more climate breakdown, would end up not having had their commitments to either capitalism or civilization ultimately affected one bit. So anti-politics is then about always fighting the authorities of the now which coerce us, about making lives for ourselves now under different conditions, about resistance and rebellion. It is why guerrillas and pirates and a certain kind of anarchist are the examples which fill the first half of this book.

What I'm saying, then, is that I think, like Alan Moore, that anarchy really is the situation we are in. It's the only situation we could ever be in. It is "reality" or "the universe" or "existence" by another name. What we haven't quite got round to yet, as a species, is this idea that leaving things alone, and people to themselves, is ultimately better, if you want to survive, than imagining you have all this knowledge and know better and can organise things on purpose, in ways that exploit, domesticate and control, and still leave everything relatively intact and people at large relatively at peace. The Daoists, as I've already said, held peace, harmony, humility and quietude as their highest values. They saw no virtue in possession, acquisition and control. They talk of minding their own business in their simple villages and of not even looking across the border to see how folks go about their business over there. Life, for them, is life, a natural business revolving very much around parochial simplicity. In comparison, we have billionaires whose careers are based on environmental destruction who have workers whose health is but a passing fancy to them, who take environmentally damaging space flights for fun and talk of inhabiting other planets while their workers may not take piss breaks. I hope I don't need to be a moralist to enable people to see the disparity in values involved in that difference. Elon Musk, by the way, has over 180 million Twitter followers as I say this which indicates a lot of fawning fanboys taken in by such a vision of life in this anarchy. Are we going to go along with that or be an insurrection against it and all it stands for? Do we engage in a politics of handing over responsibility (which brought us here) to do that or do we engage in an anti-politics of being present for ourselves (which eschews it)? We all must decide on an ongoing basis.

But how would we do the latter anyway? Well, perhaps you don't. Perhaps it's not for you. For me it's certainly a matter, primarily, of personal authenticity. It's not just a belief

or a thought process. Its something that you are that wells up from within and will not be denied. It is personal existence set against the ways the powerful have ordered and organised social existence. I think if you come to get involved in opposing the dominant thinking in our world today – perhaps in climate demonstrations, anti-capitalist actions, anti-racism protests, protests protesting trans-exclusionary action, actions against police brutality, that sort of thing – then its possible for the spark to be ignited within you and for that chink in the civilizational armour that's been opened up to widen to a crack and then, eventually, to completely break apart so that you see that all these things are actually related. Its not just about human industrial activity ruining the environment or capitalists who exploit “resources” for profit or racists or gender critical people. All these things are linked by authoritarianism and by their apparatuses which they manipulate to some perceived advantage of their own which causes other people to suffer. Such people might then come to see that its about landlords and parliaments and political leaders too (as in domination, hierarchy, authority). Its about systems used to contain and control us where these things all intersect as a means to this control in a political centralisation seen as necessary (but which isn't). The problems are actually very simple to identify if, these days, imposed upon us in increasingly complex ways.

So I think there is the opportunity for you to become the insurrection too at the point when such a realisation becomes more important to you than doing as you're told, fitting in or playing by the imposed rules anymore. Its an ethical Rubicon to be crossed or a realisation to have. (Alan Moore describes it as a kind of apocalyptic revelation at the end of the second book of *V for Vendetta*.) Its also, by the way, a fiction of reality to be seen through – for everyone everywhere within these systems will be telling you that capitalism and civilization, for example, are absolutely normal and for the best. So it



requires a large amount of independence and thinking for yourself which, let's be honest, neither governments nor news broadcasters nor even school systems really want you to have. Even many parents, sons and daughters of the prevailing systems of thought as they are, teach their children to fit in and to want what everybody else wants. There is solid logic in the fact that Jesus of Nazareth apparently told people to leave their families and their jobs and join a community based on entirely different values made up of random other people. But, perhaps as the stories about Jesus show too, you have to be prepared to make this break in a material sense besides coming to the ethical place in your thinking where it has pretty much become an imperative for you anyway. People who live in anarchist communes, for example, don't just wake up one morning and decide to do it out of the blue. There's a lot been going on in the background in human lives to get to the point at which that seems inevitable. That's why education is so important as well as communicating the problems with things in a clear and concise way to people – testifying to your truth, as it were. We must all do that, whatever we have to say, even though we are not encouraged to do that either by systems which want to stifle and control personal expression as well.

In this, anti-politics addresses the public/private distinction many (not least anarchists) often fall foul of. Anti-politics is both and its neither. It lays down no ground rules nor insists you stick to stipulations. If you feel this insurrection inside you I believe you'll find ways to articulate it and you'll find other people of similar mind with whom you can join up and share their company or do things together with them – perhaps forming communities or associations or the like, for example. But there's no defined path for it. As the insurrection, as a participant in anti-politics, you set out on your own path through the wilderness and that's entirely the point. The insurrection is a leaderless

existence in the present in which you are free to choose what you will be according to values that you decide – although they will more than likely be ones that defy capitalism, civilization and established authority simply because these are all things that constrict and constrain us.

For myself, if this is any help, its very much a matter of these things and living a life in defiance of them whilst giving a clear message that these things haven't worked, are destructive and dominating in their existence, and that they should be abandoned willingly as matters of good common sense or actively confronted and opposed if people will not stop with them. So for me its about anti-authoritarianism, post-capitalism [which means creating new ways for people to have relationships that are not about money or wealth], post-civilizationalism [which extends the previous category into one that totally rethinks human organisation and communal existence in terms of human relationships] and the creation of autonomous, but not anti-social, ways of living. If we have need to attack the systems of control that oppress most of us along the way in the midst of that, well, there will be lots of opportunities to do that that might be taken too. We only have the lives we live in which to act and we only have the opportunities of the present to take. Things may look bleak, especially if your head is full of things the media put there, but you have to clear your head of that, unplug from it, educate yourself, actualise yourself in opposition to that which seeks to control us, and plot your own course by means of your own guerrilla mind.

But enough of this analysis of the recent history of our problems for we know them only too well. What we need is an alternative, one that provides a new economics out of anti-politics that is not based on the exploitation of many by a few or of one person by

another. It so happens that anarchists have a name for just such a thing and its name is MUTUAL AID. The classic text on mutual aid is the one Peter Kropotkin wrote as popular science in 1902. It aimed to counter predatory and privileged takes on Darwinism which emphasized competition and “survival of the fittest” [not a phrase of Darwin’s but of Herbert Spencer] to the detriment of solidarity and cooperation in the process of a species’ evolution. Kropotkin was quite successful in this respect in that, at least in some places, mutual aid became taught to biology students and it still exists to this day amongst those who hold the description “anarchist” in high esteem. Since “mutual aid” is to be the subject of most of the rest of this book, then, I intend to look at it as it is regarded by a number of more contemporary anarchist writers who are more used to mutual aid in the context of the modern world than Kropotkin could have been over a century ago when he wrote his study based on animal societies and human societies of the past. What I aim to show as a result is not only what mutual aid is, properly understood, but also that it is, in practice, the ability to undermine capitalism, and its modes of thought, both thoroughly and completely, as a method of administering an anti-politics which is about the attack of political establishments and the furtherance of lives of our own.

We may usefully start with the analysis of the “Co-founders of Symbiosis”, “a confederation of community organizations across North America, building a democratic and ecological society from the ground up”, and their document “Reimagining Revolutionary Organizing”. This document begins by examining “power and social change” in tandem with the earlier analysis of the German political philosopher, Hannah Arendt. Classifying today’s political situation as “a crisis, in which nothing fundamentally changes despite a seemingly endless series of catastrophes”, this collective argue that

“without pre-existing mass organizations, the public has no way to collectively withdraw its support” [from capitalist society], going on to add that “most people will never even consider retracting support for governing institutions if they don’t see viable alternatives.” What is needed here, they argue, is an “oppositional narrative” and even possibly “oppositional institutions”. In short, if you want to leave or even oppose capitalism you need other, viable alternatives and these need to be, in some measure, convincing to those you are expecting to become participants in them. They then remark, not without good reason, that simply having a vague wish for “revolution” or recognizing capitalism’s failure and harm, by itself, can end up being indistinguishable from apathy if you do nothing about it. This is to concede that completely insignificant numbers of people will be convinced by the theory or ideology of anarchy or anti-politics alone.

The point here is that if we want to create a post-capitalist world then we are the ones who have to make it and prepare for it. We have to be thinking ahead and creating the very things we want to see replace the things which oppress us. We have to make the “community-rooted participatory politics emerging out of revolutionary crisis” - as this collective of Symbiosis founders put it. Or, again, “A revolutionary transfer of authority to popular organs of radical democracy requires the pre-existence of such participatory institutions, not a naive faith that they will be conjured into being out of a general strike, mass retraction of public support, or insurrectionary upheaval.” This collective, clearly not averse to the ideas and thinking of the Communalist, Murray Bookchin (and so not necessarily to my personal taste which is much more in favour of the anarchy of Wolfi Landstreicher discussed at more length above), imagine future liberatory institutions which, to my mind, come with problems attached it is beyond the scope of this book to

critique at length but the basic thesis here, that its up to us, that whatever we do must exist before we can expect anyone to be persuaded to join it, is sound. Symbiosis imagine individual projects, which can be stand alone and be fine tuned to cater to specific problems, issues or communities, but which can also be organized as a network. This ethos of working together and mutually re-enforcing one another is also very applicable to mutual aid, something which, we should remember, is about creating a reciprocal community of relations and not really at all about individual acts of charity.

Cindy Milstein, in her book *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*, discusses mutual aid under the heading “the ethical content” [i.e. of anarchism]. She thinks of anarchism in this book, as do I in mine, as an “ethical compass” [i.e. its values give the practice of living an orientation and, in my terms here, an “anti-politics”]. But there is also the issue of making these anarchist values “tangible”. Consequently, she speaks of a “communal anarchist ethic” and in a way that is not prescriptive. This is important for if, like me, you think of anarchism as values or virtues, you realise that human beings must be left free to apply these values or virtues as seems fit and proper to them in the specific circumstances of their lives and situations (i.e. like pirate crews left to organise themselves as they see fit). Thus, when Milstein says that “a plurality of applications is precisely an anarchist value”, I totally agree with her. Mutual aid, consequently, may be given and applied in any number of ways — as those supplying and providing it see fit or as need seems apparent, in fact. There is no prescribed way to do it and no proscribed way not to do it. Whatever works, whatever helps, whatever seems good, goes.

In her description of “the ethical content” of anarchism Cindy Milstein starts to elucidate how mutual aid works. It is about creating a “freedom from” the exploitation and

domination inherent in capitalism but also about a “freedom to” express yourself freely and freely associate with others to common and mutual advantage. In this way we start to see that mutual aid should be a liberatory mechanism and mode of living. It should set people free. Yet it is also based on anarchism’s notion of a freedom and equality of people who are equally free [i.e. I cannot be free if others are not equally as free as I am, a socially-generated conception of freedom or the value “Freedom can never just be for, or about, me”]. Milstein nuances this idea a little, speaking of the “equality of unequals”:

*“Bound up within positive freedom is the notion that people are not the same, and that’s a good thing. Communities, geographic and social, are also distinct from each other. This is why humans must be free to figure out what makes the most sense for each person and situation. Anarchism believes in everyone’s ability to take part in thinking through and acting on, in compassionate ways, the world they inhabit. It maintains that everyone deserves to shape and share in society—a principle that undergirds a non-hierarchical outlook, if opposition to hierarchy has any meaning at all. But this doesn’t mean that people all have equal needs and desires, nor stable ones. People want different things over their lifetimes, just as communities have differing demands over time. The anarchist ethic of the equality of unequals shatters the dehumanizing notion promulgated under capitalism that everything, including each person, is exchangeable—equally a commodity, and thus without inherent worth—replacing it with the rehumanizing concept of the value of each individual.”*

What Milstein herself thinks this means is that:

*"Everyone and everything has equal value, and should equally be provided sustenance in order to fully blossom. What that sustenance looks like, however, will differ in quantity and quality, based on differences in needs and desires. For example, ethical health care would not be a cookie-cutter list of services, as if people's bodies are all alike. Nor would it be apportioned in meager, exacting amounts. It would instead be tailored toward each individual's specific wellness as an always-available social good, in as much abundance as possible. But the equality of unequals isn't simply about material needs. It is a sensibility to guide how humans can justly apply equal worth to the rich non-equivalency of differentiation."*

Readers will surely already be seeing here that such values and practices cut the legs from under capitalist thinking and operate according to different values. This approach treats people as the valuable but differentiated, individual human beings that they are, realising that needs are specific and not one size fits all. This is already being anti-political rather than political to my way of thinking here. As such, we are here already taking people, and their needs, seriously in a way capitalism does not. Here people are not resources to be allocated or dealt with but human beings to be interacted and engaged with to our mutual benefit. By taking people seriously, we make things better for everybody.

Milstein builds on this, via a reconfiguration of a communist ethic, to give an anarchism of mutual aid a participatory, fraternal, cooperative basis. Starting with "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" she modifies this, under an anarchist, anti-political understanding, to "from each according to their abilities and passions, to each according to their needs and desires." She goes on to say that "In this

view, people all contribute in various ways to each other and their communities—and not simply in an economic sense. Indeed, this ethic helps to re-embed ‘the economy’ into the wholeness of life.” This is something I wish to emphasize with regard to mutual aid too. It is not a matter of mutual aid being an activity done within life; rather, *mutual aid is to become your habitual means of existence. This is how you turn politics into anti-politics.* Mutual aid is a matter of building a contributory, participatory, fundamentally social means of existence across food provision, housing, child care, education, medical services, everything you can think of. As Cindy Milstein continues, “The plethora of human contributions would be based on what people are good at, what they enjoy, and also what they collectively determine is desirable as well as necessary. One person’s needs (wool mittens, apples, or books) might be another person’s desires. In a good society, people would want to satisfy as much of both as possible.” How much this would have changed from a life lived by capitalist, political values is shown in that “Production and distribution would involve neither compulsion nor drudgery, nor be something distinct from ‘free time’.” All would just be “life”. Politics would become anti-politics.

You see, the anarchist anti-politics recognises that “an economy” exists to service life: life does not (read: should not) exist to service an economy. So you are not of value according to your economic productivity in an anarchist understanding: You are of value because you are you and you exist. The capitalist, as we have already seen, is one who both does and does not count the cost. Everything [including people] is just resources to be used up (for my personal profit). The anarchist, however, not only counts the cost but mitigates it and makes decisions which reduce the cost of human existence in a finite world. The capitalist, equally, is one who thinks that giving you a small amount of money in exchange for work you are compelled to do is a fair exchange. The anarchist, on the



other hand, thinks that "work" should not be distinct from "free time" and that compulsion has no place in human existence. All this comes to mean that the problem for anarchists is not that we lack the resources, the will or the ideas to initiate and maintain a new, socially libertarian and more equitable way of life but that it is authoritarian capitalists and their minions who are holding the world captive to capitalism with their politics of wealth, coercion and oppression. This is the problematic, the very real, material problematic, that an anarchism of mutual aid intends to overcome at both the material and ideological levels through the deployment of anti-politics.

Consequently, when I have thought about such things, I always find it very interesting that when people imagine "an anarchist future" they struggle not to imagine the same world as they already live in - but [somehow] on anarchist terms. I think this is wrong-headed and unimaginative, if somewhat understandable. The problem is that capitalism made this world. But what capitalism made is not something anti-capitalism [i.e. an anarchism of mutual aid] can maintain. These must be different, they must have different outcomes, and they must have different means. Living your life by means of an anarchism of mutual aid will not be the same, you will not have the same values or outcomes. If you do, it means something is wrong for capitalism and anti-capitalism are entirely opposed and operate according to different values and ideologies. Or rather, they should. It is the same as politics and anti-politics. They are not the same thing, do not look the same and do not result in the same outcomes. In one you get national navies scouring the world to create oppressive empires and in the other you get pirates who make their own rules and look after themselves and satisfy their own, self-generated desires (whilst, incidentally, looking after as many of those of their own kind who suffer as a result of this choice as they can, as was mentioned previously).

In this respect, an anarchism of mutual aid is what Cindy Milstein calls “applying ethics to social organization”. It is not the capitalist “from each according to what they are forced to do, to each according to their financial means, and otherwise people go without” as Milstein herself phrases this. The ethic to be applied here is not that delegated people are tasked with caring for certain specific others [which could be authoritarian or create unwilling obligation] but that “people will provide and care for each other”. Consequently, an aspect missing from much popular (i.e. social media) conception of mutual aid is that it is MUTUAL aid. We should not get so hung up on the aid part of this term that we forget the mutual part. Mutual aid is social, participatory and contributory. It involves everyone doing what they can, helping as they are able, however small or insignificant, whether outdoors or at home. But it does involve everybody in both the giving and receiving — just as if we were all one big, interactive, inter-relational community, in fact. It puts the onus on human communities, of whatever constitution, to sustain themselves and look after themselves and enrich themselves [metaphorically and materially but not necessarily monetarily!]. “Imagine if everything from energy to education was such a ‘from each, to each’ institution”, Cindy Milstein suggests, helpfully.

Yet it is only now that Milstein explicitly addresses mutual aid [all that has come before is but contextual prelude]. Milstein says of mutual aid that it “necessitates intricate, complex relationships as well as harmonious differentiation to achieve... reciprocal exchange.” In this respect, the activities of Jesus of Nazareth, who taught his followers [who were forbidden to carry any money] to care for people in exchange for a meal and a bed for the night, are mutual aid in every sense of the words. Milstein’s view on mutual aid, which she takes from Kropotkin’s analysis in his book of the same name, is that if people behave this way it produces a greater abundance, both materially and otherwise,

than if people are forced, exploited and coerced into things. In competitive schemes, only a few can ever win and lots have to lose to facilitate the winning. But the point of mutual aid is that everybody wins together (and has a stake in doing so). Imagine this ethos at the heart of an economy and imagine the difference it would make to those a competitive capitalism disdains and discards [or doesn't even account for, such as the mentally or physically disabled otherwise disparagingly described as "economically unproductive"]. Here solid anarchist values such as cooperation and solidarity are the necessary motivating factors and mutualism becomes the basis for such an anarchist "household". ["Economy" is a Greek word originally to do with households.]

Milstein continues:

*"Mutual aid is one of the most beautiful of anarchism's ethics. It implies a lavish, boundless sense of generosity, in which people support each other and each other's projects. It expresses an open-handed spirit of abundance, in which kindness is never in short supply. It points to new relations of sharing and helping, mentoring and giving back, as the very basis for social organization. Mutual aid communalizes compassion, thereby translating into greater 'social security' for everyone—without need for top-down institutions. It is solidarity in action, writ large, whether on the local or global level. When felt and lived out as a daily sensibility, in combination with other anarchist ethics, cooperation creates fundamentally different social relations, which offer humanity the best odds of transforming the values of a hierarchical society."*

So Milstein is here quite clear that mutual aid is not charity, something which can easily be seen as a kind of capitalist paternalism in which a "have" deigns to give to a "have

not” [and keeps relationships that way in so doing, an example of politics contrary to an anti-politics]. Mutual aid, as an ethos, horizontalizes relationships. It rejects and corrupts hierarchy. It is a freedom of equals [or unequals if we take Milstein’s point about difference on board]. Mutual aid is not about getting something back for your aid. It stresses, and hopefully creates, reciprocal relations and it does not count the worth of the aid given for it is not an ethic of measurement or calculation. We see this, coming back once more to the example of a historical Jew, in the activities of Jesus which, so I have argued elsewhere [in my chapter on Jesus in my book *Black Dog*], are based on creating a community of mutual aid, without hierarchy, in which people pool their talents and resources in order to foment a radically new way of living, one without social strata or haves and have nots and not based in authority or compulsion either. Mutual aid is the philosophy of human solidarity and cooperation, a world in which everyone is a brother or sister if one wills it and where sharing what you have or can do with another in need is both natural and normal. Here, the idea of “profit” is totally expunged and the idea of “accounting” in order to place people in the correct financial relationships to one another is forgotten as just a bad memory of more exploitative, less cooperative, times.

Taking this understanding on board, one starts to see how such an ethic might piss off both the capitalists and those wedded to “politics”. Such a practice of anti-politics inevitably becomes an “Insurrectionary Mutual Aid” - which just happens to be the title of a document produced by the Curious George Brigade, an anarchist collective from Queens, New York. [This, incidentally, is exactly what I think Jesus was doing in his historical context and so why, ultimately, the Roman state murdered him.] This collective talks about “a resistance of direct action” and “the possibility of resistance to global capitalism” and warns us that “waiting only teaches waiting; in acting, one learns to act”.

It speaks of insurrection as “an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion, sabotage and direct resistance calling in question the legitimacy and efficacy of the government.” This is a matter of “the social upheaval it generates” and is a means to “expand the paralysis of normality”. In the use of such language we find ourselves in touch with anti-politics.

The key here is to see mutual aid as something which can do these things and, in this respect, we must totally remove it from a capitalist frame of reference. Mutual aid is NOT charity. It is NOT responding to isolated begging requests. It is NOT a disjointed, random, vague sort of help [and especially not when measured in how many units of local currency you can give to a random stranger you might never see again or have ever seen at all]. It is programmatic, organized, regular, ordinary. It is AN ECONOMY, a way of living, a means of communal survival. It is, done properly, destructive of capitalism, its ideology and construction of human relationships. Mutual aid — when you live it — is an insurrection against, and attack upon, capitalism, an anti-politics fighting the politics of “charity”. Mutual aid, being “freely given help (in the form of services and resources) to others in our community”, is the promotion of an entirely different ethos and politics than the one capitalism has violently imposed upon us and those who practice it should be seen as insurrectionists taking their stand against the violence of that system whose only aim is to dominate us so that it can profit from us and utilise us as resources. Who would have thought that something so simple as offering help to other people in ways you can provide would prove so effective and so dangerous?! Unlike charity, which merely secures the status quo, mutual aid changes and replaces the status quo.

Using an analysis which notes that government agencies always offer their aid “strategically” and in order to maximize compliance with their vision of society, the Curious George Brigade point out that “It comes as no surprise that our leaders are willing to let us die while they implement their misguided plans to maintain law and order”. Government, a matter of politics, is not based on human solidarity; it is based on control and utilising a population seen as resources. Government explicitly tells you what you can and can’t do to maintain its “utopia” of control and exploitation by the capitalists who keep it in place for their greater benefit. In this context, the Curious George Brigade’s idea is that mutual aid, an economy of cooperation and solidarity, is a reclaiming of the old anarchist tactic of Propaganda by the Deed. Such a tactic has often had a shady past and involved, or simply been about, violence. But it need not be. The point here is that anarchists are people of direct, rather than political, action. They are those who act in their own best interests as a community of people with diverse, but mutually resolvable, needs rather than seeking to manipulate everyone else to their advantage and create a society which exists for their benefit but at the expense of others. Government and capitalism create [a necessary] dependence [if not an outright oppression] but mutual aid, and the anti-politics that motivate it, is a matter of reciprocal interdependence. A commitment to the solidarity of mutual aid teaches people that there is another way to live and sets about living it.

But this is about action and preparation. An anarchism of mutual aid, which is to become a way of life, an anti-politics, is not about clinging to capitalism. It is not a hobby you do within a capitalist situation but something which changes and replaces that situation. It is antagonistic of capitalism and, if you practice it with great enough effect, it may even attract hostility from capitalist others (who will imagine their exploited profit margins

slipping away). Yet if we are committed to it, as we must be if we want to save ourselves and others from the destructive horrors of capitalism and its incarcerating mentality, then we must prepare. Here the anarchist value of education comes into its own. We need to start identifying how we will survive and who we can work with to do so [this is really not a thing one can do alone]. Basics like food, water, medications, power, communication, shelter are important, naturally, but identifying who is prepared to help and join with you is important too. Mutual aid, in many respects, can be seen as networking together all the like-minded people, each with their own talents, services and resources to offer. Someone might be able to offer a bed or a meal, someone else might be able to drive you somewhere, another might be able to do something that you need doing or look after a group of children freeing their parents to do yet other things people need. And this is not just about helping out in emergencies either. Mutual aid as a way of life is about creating relationships between people such that the people become a community who share their lives together. The nuclear family is a capitalist invention too but an ethos of mutual aid pushes that aside and instantiates the notion of the human family, the family of voluntary association, in its place instead which anarchists eulogise as free association in general. So you have a spare room? Why shouldn't someone without anywhere to stay make use of it? They will surely have something they can contribute in a spirit of mutuality to your common benefit too. By these modest means we aid a social revolution and encourage a social insurrection that may build to a complete change in our societal way of life.

Yet, as the Curious George Brigade point out in a series of "pros and cons" at the end of their short article, it is a situation of "advantages" and "difficulties". Mutual aid allows us to focus our energies on helping people in a positive way which involves our direct

action. It connects us with other people and allows us to make a difference in whatever ways we can. It also helps us refine how these things actually work in practice rather than in theory papers, essays or thought experiments. The more we do mutual aid, the better [and more effective] we will become at doing it. Such activity also breathes life into the networks of people taking part in it, in turn making them better able to respond to the various crises a capitalist world is bound to generate. Such action also, as already suggested, acts as propaganda to others, showing that there are people who care and are prepared to do something about it, something of practical help and consequence.

So mutual aid (as a major plank of an anti-political, anarchist economy) is a peaceful, anti-political means of helping others, creating community and degrading the destructive and exploitative capitalist mentality and so, in this respect, it is also a way of fighting both for something and against something at the same time. In doing so, it also refutes the notion [which capitalism wants to foster] of our own powerlessness. Yet it relies on creating relationships and it relies on people who have educated themselves and others in anarchist values such as those I listed earlier. It takes organization and often requires logistical expertise. [Recently it came to my attention, for example, that someone had found some very helpful maps of where homeless encampments were located in their American city. Someone had obviously taken the time and effort to create them, helping others in the process by doing so.] It may in some cases be dangerous or involve engaging people possessed of a capitalist mentality, or operating under its auspices, such as cops, government agencies or capitalist interests. The point that the Curious George Brigade make last is then actually one never to forget: "Mutual Aid is not charity! It is an attack!" (Another reason my earlier examples are guerrillas, pirates and anarchists, in fact.)



The point here, made explicitly in a book called *The Black Flag Catalyst Revolt Guide* by an anarchist group involved in direct action and street protests called Black Flag Catalyst is that mutual aid is actually a tactic in an ongoing conflict, one that has existed ever since capitalism was forced upon people and they became resources for a capitalist-authoritarian machine. (All Gerrard Winstanley's Diggers in the England of 1649 really wanted to do was live, in a subsistence way, on the basis of mutual aid, we might reflect. They were, of course, forcibly prevented from doing so by authoritarian violence.) We did not start this war but if we would survive it then we must resist it and rebel against it. In this context, Black Flag Catalyst say the following:

*"Mutual aid is based in community control, aiding one another to break free from capitalism and colonial authority. Mutual aid is simple, it's the breaking of the binary of the 'haves and have nots' with the intention to re-allocate for equitable access to resources, education, and needs. Seems simple enough. However, mutual aid is also a legacy, and a practice.*

*These types of projects are perfect for pacifists and those who do not seek conflict with the state. Mutual aid projects might already exist in your area, such as Food Not Bombs or other local efforts, and these are necessary components of building dual power. The mutual aid projects you engage in and help build should not be confused with charity. Mutual aid is a long-term commitment to the community and a tool to break free from the state and capital."*

I hope this helpful description helps to re-situate the nature and importance of mutual aid in your mind and how it can be both help and an attack at the same time, a way of building an alternative lifestyle, and set of values to live by, to capitalism. Here it is a

positive advantage that mutual aid might be taking place in hundreds, maybe even thousands, of ways, each in individual projects with their own aims, purposes and communities (besides in informal ways that are never acknowledged as such). Not everyone has the same skills and not everyone can offer the same things. But, by the same token, not everyone wants the same things or has the same needs. Plurality, in both cases, is, then, very good and entirely necessary. If we can get as many people as possible to participate in the mutual aid it only increases the possibilities and opportunities for the whole. [Here yet another value and virtue of anarchism comes into play: decentralization. These efforts work best when they are local and directly administered by those most directly involved. They might be coordinated with other groups but those involved most directly are those best able, all together, to decide what should be done and how.] In fact, as Dean Spade, an associate professor at Seattle University School of Law and someone who has worked “to build queer and trans liberation based in racial and economic justice” says in “Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival”, a prelude to a chapter from his book *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (And The Next)*, “expanding use of mutual aid strategies will be the most effective way to support vulnerable populations to survive, mobilize significant resistance, and build the infrastructure we need for the coming disasters.”

What this means is that mutual aid is a radical and necessary alternative to the capitalist norm, something aiming to change everything and to turn political practice and relationships into anti-political practice and relationships. It is, for example, like when one person steals something; the system simply replaces what was stolen and punishes the thief. But what if everyone steals everything? Then society changes overnight! This mass participation aspect to mutual aid is then important for, in helping others

habitually, people learn to live differently. It is learning by doing. That they need to do this should not be in question when even determined practitioners of mutual aid can casually slip into conversations how they bought something nice “from Amazon”, the company, until recently run by Jeff Bezos, which spends its time asset-stripping the world, running its workers into the ground and having a pollution footprint which dwarfs that of whole countries. How can it be that even an anarchist would do business with such an entity? It is because minds are still colonized by capitalism which, to be fair, has made a determined and thorough-going attempt at such colonization which has been, and still is, very effective.

So if people want to even mitigate, let alone retard or stop the progress of, capitalism, literally saving lives in the process, then people need to be mobilized for resistance. As has been mentioned earlier in this book, as well as elsewhere in my writing of the books *Black Void*, *Black Flag* and *Black Dog*, this is both an internal and an external matter. We must materially affect the world but our minds must also become changed, they must be reconfigured with new values which lead to practices of which mutual aid is an important one. It is a matter of our personal transformation leading to transformative alternatives becoming apparent which, in practice, transform other people’s lives and possibilities as well. [So, it is about relying on each other rather than on Amazon, as one example!] Here, as Dean Spade notes in “Solidarity Not Charity”, reformism will not be the answer for it is “designed to demobilize by asserting that the problem has been taken care of, meanwhile making as little material change as possible.” As anarchists and anti-politicians, we want mobilized, active, participatory, contributory citizens. We want those who take responsibility and we want to teach people to do exactly that. And not just some of them but all of them! We want a “politics of being present”, as Katherine

Brown described my ideas when I shared them with her. This will make all of us safer and give all of us more social security. We also want material change and so should not be fobbed off with promises, policy statements, intentions and the like. Anarchists, as I repeat again, are people of direct action rather than political action. They do not go “through channels”. They do it themselves. They take responsibility. They do not settle for cosmetic changes because they want to affect root causes. They make the difference because they are the difference. They are the way, the truth and the life.

Anarchists seek to take action which counters the divisionary tactics of authoritarian capitalism, which mobilizes people to take an active interest in their community and which offers material benefit to the world. Mutual aid, done right, addresses all three of these concerns. The result is a contribution towards a liberatory and communitarian mode of life. One of the aspects of mutual aid which recommends it, in fact, is that it does encourage liberatory community in people’s lives, freeing them from capitalist chains as a result. Mutual aid, in this respect, can be seen as a kind of structured participation or an organized sharing. [Anarchists are not opposed to structure or organization – not least since anarchy, as far as I am concerned, is “self-organisation” in a nutshell. In reality, in fact, its hard to see how any concerted and effective community action could take place without a kind of organisation. But anarchists do become more concerned when such things start to become institutionalized. Then the alarm bells start ringing!] Dean Spade in “Solidarity Not Charity” asks four questions of his “own work studying and participating in queer and trans liberation projects and in organizations centered on border and prison abolition” with regard to asking about its effectiveness in this regard:

1. Does it provide material relief?
2. Does it leave out an especially marginalized part of the affected group (e.g., people with criminal records, people without immigration status)?
3. Does it legitimize or expand a system we are trying to dismantle?
4. Does it mobilize people, especially those most directly impacted, for ongoing struggle?

Of course, not all of these questions will always be relevant in every case we can think of and, at other times, some will be more important than others, whilst yet other questions may suggest themselves as well. Yet what is important here is that we realize that mutual aid is not simply something random or done on the hoof [although in imaginable emergency situations it may need to be and so we should be planning and preparing for that too]. Mutual aid is something that can, and should, be planned, structured, organized and done with regard to creating a logistics set up to carry it out habitually. It is only in habitual ways that we will make difference and change minds as well as lives. Making mutual aid habitual, normalizing it as a way to live, thrive and survive, puts it on a different footing to the temporary and often random notion of “helping someone out in a crisis”. We may help people out in such ways but, apart from averting or resolving the immediate crisis, which is, of course, not unimportant in itself, it changes nothing structural in the long term, either for them or us. Such people are still vulnerable to further [or even repeated, continual] crises because a political situation has not been turned into an anti-political one. The rent you cannot make this month just turns into the

rent you cannot make next month, for example. Mutual aid, and an anarchism of mutual aid, seeks not only to deal with such “pinch points” of life but also - and necessarily - with its structure and organization. It is thus about “reignit[ing] people’s imaginations”, as Dean Spade has it, and about not letting capitalism artificially limit our options. Spade outlines three modes of action that resisters of capitalism can take in “Solidarity Not Charity”:

1. Work to dismantle existing harmful systems and/or beat back their expansion.
2. Work to directly provide for people targeted by such systems and institutions.
3. Work to build an alternative infrastructure through which people can get their needs met.

To be sure these kinds of work take us beyond the reactive “helping people in need” mentality — but then they should. Spade, in filling out the consequences of these kinds of work, moves into the realm of activism aimed to actively impede or resist capitalist systems and operations too. [What else would you do if your community is under attack? This is anti-politics as a necessary antidote to political oppression.] This moves us back into the territory that was occupied by Black Flag Catalyst, above, in a “Revolt Guide” which was all about a mutual aid of active disobedience and disruption of the capitalist world, supporting each other and the community at large in the process. Again, this will not be for everybody. But it will be for somebody. Not everyone will want to sabotage a pipeline or train people not to call the cops to solve disputes but disrupting city council meetings, prison visiting or befriending someone vulnerable you see in your locality will

be just as good. What matters is that everyone sees the community as their business, takes responsibility and takes part, for every connection is valuable and networks of care and concern only grow when people step up and take the initiative to make them. This is then what I think of when Katherine Brown's "politics of being present" comes to mind. We are present. We are there. We are taking responsibility for ourselves and others.

In this respect, Dean Spade's definition of mutual aid in "Solidarity Not Charity" brings us back to the point once again:

*"Mutual aid is a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable."*

Key there is the "by actually building new social relations". This, in the end, is what mutual aid is and what makes it anti-politics. Its not vague or random help, much less a desire to help but no action to do so. It goes way beyond this: it builds new social relations, it forms and maintains a community, people who feel bonds with one another, bonds of responsibility, solidarity and fraternity (guerrillas, pirates). It is, thus, both an activity which helps people in need but also one which takes offensive action, is offensive action, against oppressive capitalist authoritarianism in any form in which it shows itself. And, as Spade also notes, "Effective social movements always include elements of mutual aid." He himself notes the example of the Black Panthers who had:

*"survival programs, including the free breakfast program, the free ambulance program, free medical clinics, a program offering rides to elderly people doing errands, and a school aimed at providing a liberating and rigorous curriculum to children. The Black Panthers' programs mobilized people by creating spaces where they could access basic needs and build shared analysis about the conditions they were facing."*

Such is not so different from the bottom up [and these things must always be bottom up] progressive educational ideas pioneered in the past by people like the Catalan anarchist Francisco Ferrer which were also taken up and supported by people like Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Voltairine de Cleyre in the "Ferrer School" they helped found in New York. Goldman herself, in fact, spoke of parents leaving their children with designated others whilst they went off and did other necessary community tasks, feeling that some would step forward, in the context of an anarchism of mutual aid, to supply childcare facilities and educational opportunities as their contribution to the successful functioning of the whole community. Strongly against the institutionalization of children, her ideal, as set forth in a 1906 essay, "The Child and Its Enemies", was that:

*"he who has freed himself from the fetters of the thoughtlessness and stupidity of the commonplace; he who can stand without moral crutches, without the approval of public opinion — private laziness, Friedrich Nietzsche called it — may well intone a high and voluminous song of independence and freedom; he has gained the right to it through fierce and fiery battles. These battles already begin at the most delicate age."*

We can take from this attitude that no one is too young to be in receipt of the benefits of mutual aid, internal and external, material and ideological, and neither is anyone too



young to be set on the path of freedom and inter-dependence that eschews capitalist-authoritarian interference and coercion.

To round out this section of my book on mutual aid I want to reproduce some aspects of a “Mutual Aid Chart” prepared by Dean Spade and used in his teaching. The chart itself contrasts the characteristics of “horizontalist and participatory” mutual aid projects with “Hierarchical, Charitable Non-Profits and Social Service Programs” as provided by “official channels” and those working within the capitalist-authoritarian system. Here I’m only going to emphasize the former and leave out the latter by rewriting Dean Spade’s chart in my own words. The point here, then, is to describe the characteristics of a mutual aid project [in a way others are free to modify for themselves]. Such projects will tend to:

1. Have members who together make decisions and do the work.
2. Be serviced by volunteers.
3. Beg, borrow or steal its resources rather than being granted cash with stipulations attached.
4. Be “rooted in deep and wide principles of anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, racial justice, gender justice, disability justice”, etc. Principles and values will determine focus.
5. Have no “eligibility criteria” for who can receive help. Needing help is good enough.

6. Give aid without expectations on the recipient.
7. Be composed of those who want to help and make a difference rather than because they want status or prestige.
8. Engage in activities which put people on a level playing field such as having people in rotating roles.
9. Value self-determination in those being helped.
10. Value participation and so engage in consensus decision-making in regards to organization, strategy and structure.
11. Be not just about helping those in need but also disrupting the channels by which the root causes of oppression and exploitation are manifested.
12. Assess how the work is going through the eyes of those affected most by it and modify the aid given accordingly.
13. Build participation, solidarity, mobilization and radicalization through, and by means of, the mutual aid.

A couple of points [gleaned from Dean Spade's notes about this on his chart] need to be noted here as well before moving on. The first is the danger of money and professionalization. Both are likely to cripple the ethos of the action. When people get

money they usually start to argue about it. Similarly, when things become professionalized then people start to get or build power bases and wield authority. Both of these things are antithetical to the anarchist ethos of mutual aid which operates according to the interaction of the values I listed above. It needs to be remembered here that mutual aid is about more than just “offering help” in isolated cases. It is an ethos which intends to rebut and displace a capitalist-authoritarian one, an ethos which intends to build community and move beyond a society of power, status, authority and acquisition. Frankly, if I can be my radical self for a moment, it is about building a society which moves beyond money, property and authority at all. Since I am one who believes that “the means is the end” then we need to start thinking about ways to interact with and help each other without relying on money, property and authority RIGHT NOW.

The second point is in relation to participation. Obviously, this should be encouraged as widely as possible as too few people doing too many things can only lead to burnout. It is also the case that, whoever is involved, they feel a part of the group and have as much decision-making power as anyone else. A “culture of feedback and humility”, as Spade puts it, should be encouraged such that people feel encouraged to take part and “own” what they do. If people in the group can help each other and learn new skills in tandem with them [first aid is an obvious example] then people will become better equipped to provide more kinds of aid and this will not fall on certain people who are seen as the “go tos” in various situations. As stated previously, mutual aid, as a way of life, is a matter of participation, activity and preparation. If communities are not actually providing help, then they can always learn how to do so and prepare themselves for it.

I feel that, by now, I have probably said enough and so its time to round all this up and get the hell out of Dodge. To begin doing that, I return to the thought of Reader in Religion and Global Security at Birmingham University, Dr Katherine Brown. In a short paper she authored published in *Critical Studies on Terrorism* titled "Gendered Reflections on the 'Event' Narrative of 9/11" Brown discusses differing conceptions of time and reality, things which interact with differing imaginable kinds of "narrative" about the major event she focuses on (although that it even is "a major event" is, of course, the case only in a certain kind of narrative utilising specific meanings and values) to different purposes and effects. She talks here, for example, about "ordinary reality" or "subordinated realities" or "shared narratives of political reality". She also discusses this particular event as an example of "messy times" which are times "where norms fail and truths are called into question". This can lead to intellectual (and, who knows, even moral or political) "destabilisation" as given narratives have lights shone on them which reveal their cracks and flaws (or even that they are entirely held together with duct tape and at cross purposes with yet other narratives which serve other purposes).

Brown's point, in simple terms, is that people, cultures, societies, governments, law enforcement agencies, constantly tell stories for preconceived purposes in order to achieve certain outcomes and specific situations. Brown herself in her article discusses how this happens in masculinist versus feminist ways based on (so she asserts) differing conceptions of time. This, in her particular example, implicates a masculine "heroic" conception of time in which 9/11 is retold as an action film about heroes and villains and mighty deeds carried out by determined, muscular and sweaty men and of "Women's lived experience of time [which] is characterised as living bodies in limbo; of waiting to be annexed into a world shaped by men." The key here, and the reason I bring it up, is

that this second, “feminist reading of time” is a matter of being “passively present” and the people (women and other not-men) who exist in such time “are not active”. This plays into Brown’s analysis of women in terrorism as shadowy background figures of no real consequence in a world shaped and even described by men according to masculine agendas. (This idea is also found in her book *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization*.)

“Narratives of disasters”, as Brown goes on to say, “produce politics” and, in the terms I’ve been using in this book, “politics” is exactly the right word (and you don’t need to be a Reader in Religion and Global Security to understand that by now, I hope). Such narratives, where they are “official narratives”, produce politics, I would argue, in order to make people more passive. (That is, to turn manly, active men into passive, inconsequential not-men using Brown’s gendered distinctions from her short essay.) Indeed, from my perspective, the whole business Dr Brown seems to be in with her scholarship (I speak not to her own motivations here which are her own business) is a societal self-analysis in which undesired or disruptive elements (which, with extreme prejudice, are arbitrarily labelled “extremist” to no real objective standard other than that these elements are regarded as alien, other and “not like us”) are singled out, demonised and set apart as if they were almost a different species. Did those flying planes into the Twin Towers have needs that different from the rest of us? Probably not. Did they serve other interests? Probably so. But then, don’t we all? Shouldn’t we?

In terms of “deradicalisation”, however, the aim of governments (and others) is to pacify (permanently if necessary) all those elements in a society who are determined and active enough to take action against its founding principles and structures or even merely the

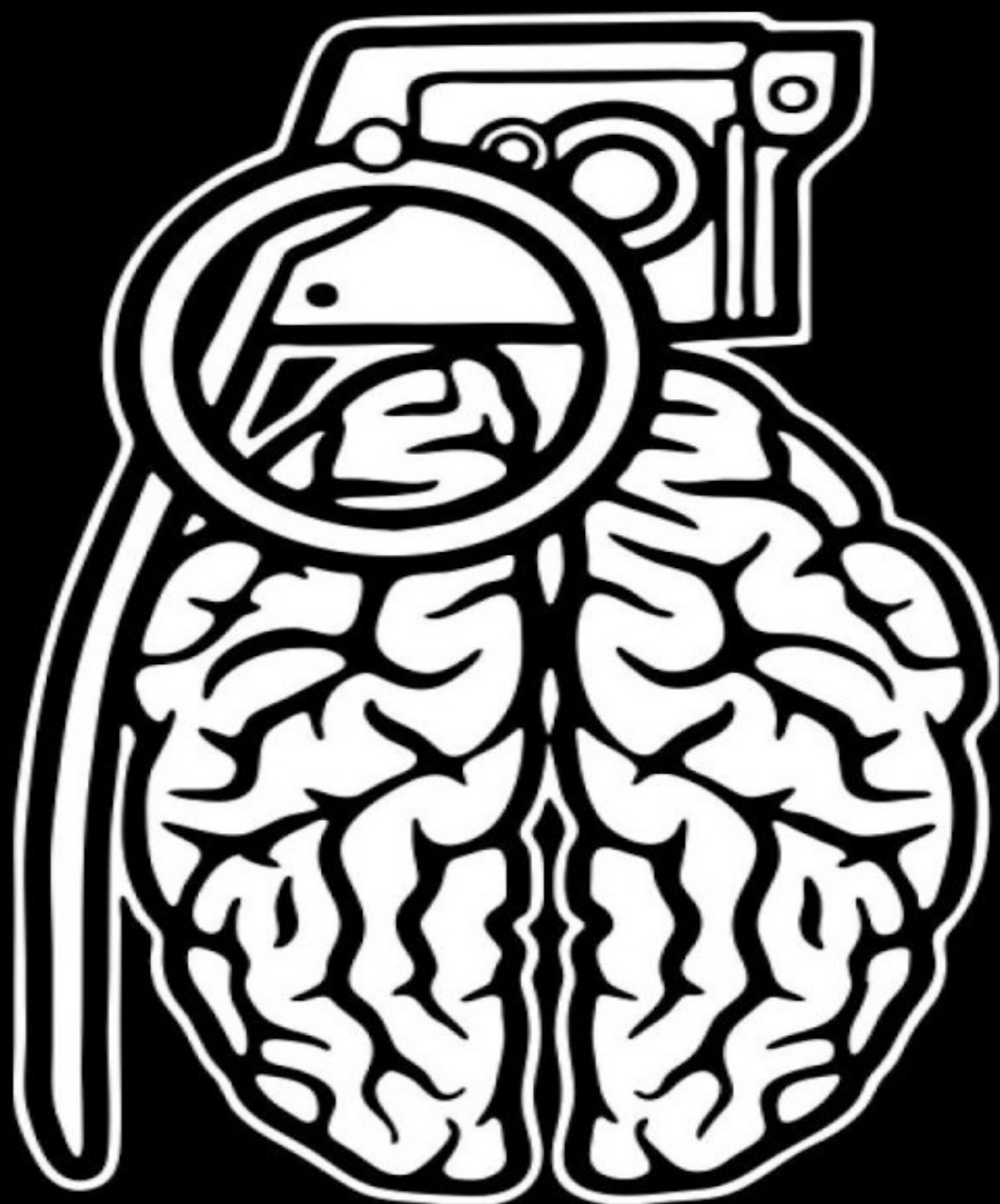
things about it which interrupt the pursuance of their own desires. These days, even if you post particularly militant messages on a social media service, you can probably expect (or at least imagine) to be put on a watch list of some kind. (Outdoors on a protest you're likely to be filmed by cops.) The books I have myself written (no doubt including this one) could probably be described by someone in some official capacity as "radicalising material" which contains "extreme beliefs" (such as "anti-capitalism", for example). And they would be right because I suppose it is. Guerrillas, pirates and anarchists are not government-friendly examples, I must admit, and talking about "attacking" "capitalism" and "civilisation" can easily be taken the wrong way. In her book *Gender, Religion, Extremism* Brown offers a rough and ready definition of radicalisation as "a process in which a person adopts extremist views and moves toward committing violence." Well, guerrillas, pirates and anarchists have, to greater and lesser extents, all done that. (I discuss examples of anarchist violence in chapter 8 of *Black Flag*.) But Brown also notes that this isn't a fixed definition and differences of definition exist in an ongoing context of conversation about what radicalisation is amongst the professionals in the field. As an example I offer Brown's "radicalization is also held to be cognitive; the holding of extreme radical beliefs is sufficient to determine that an individual is radical." Now I am fairly sure that the ideas I have written about in this book, from the perspective of an authoritarian-capitalist cop (an attitude or mentality rather than a job description), may seem like "extreme radical beliefs". Indeed, having once perused various government websites dealing with the subject, the word "anarchism" did come up (although how this word was understood is, of course, a very moot point).

The fact is that "a politics of being present", as Brown described my own ideas here to me, or "anti-politics" or "anarchism" or "social egoism" or "mutual aid" can all be seen as

“radical” or “extremist” inasmuch as they all seek the end of living in some ways (the currently dominant, exploitative, incarcerating ways) and, instead, living in others. They are all about *changing the conditions of human relationships*. In a world that is incarcerating, that is a prison, where freedoms to move to your own spaces, or to refuse to obey arbitrary authorities, or to create new cultures, are denied, frustrated and attacked, even “being present”, as Brown rightly sees the politics I am discussing here as being about, is going to be both “extreme” and “radical” – even just as a belief. This is because its standing up for yourself (and others), its defying what you are told to do, its saying “No!” where only acquiescent agreement is allowed. In a world in which your only choice is “Do as you are told”, not doing as you are told *is crime*. So is it any wonder the guerrillas, pirates and anarchists of my first half of this book were all regarded as criminals and terrorists when all they ever wanted was to live their own lives? In a world where you are coerced and exploited to live lives dictated to you by others (and majorly for their benefit) even living your own life becomes “radical” and “extremism”.

*But we should not let that stop us.* What else can we do in our anti-politics which is, simultaneously, a “politics of being present”? For “being present”, stepping up, taking responsibility for ourselves that others want to take away from us, is all that this book is about. The open secret here is that “guerrilla mind”, an example of which is the thing that produced the content of this book, is simply the mantra that you should THINK FOR YOURSELF AND ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN MEANINGS, VALUES AND DESIRES. Quick! Call the cops! We’ve got someone who makes up their own mind again!

And that, if I’m thinking crooked (for thinking straight is an entirely dogmatic business), would be ANARCHY.



**YOUR  
MIND IS A  
WEAPON.**